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Fancy being married at ten o'clock—and having a djinn come out of a bottle by afternoon!

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Fifteen deserted ships at night might give a graveyard, eerie effect; but it was all right if one kept away from those last three hulls.

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Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, $1.50. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*

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WE ARE glad that so many readers seem glad to have the Eyrie back, and we'll try to print as many letters each issue as space will permit. But don't forget that even if we can't print them, we read them! We hadn't intended to bear too heavily on science fiction. In regard to the Wellman story, "Home to Mother" in March, for instance, it seemed to us more of a horror story than sf—but we could be wrong.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

"THE SHADOW OF SATURN." March issue. By E. Hoffmann Price.

I like it—a good yarn for a number of reasons—it's intriguing and it makes sense. "Wishing is an emotional muddle. Will is pure force." So much food for thought rests in the story. A whole way of life has been projected by Price.

It is the type of yarn from which the reader, each reader will experience in accordance with his capacity for penetration into his own personality and thought patterns. "One can't ever escape from oneself and from what one has made." How true. "You can't run away from what you've made for yourself." That is Wisdom.

I like what Price has to say about CHOICE. "The stars shape your personality and the pattern of your moods, your peaks of vitality and your depths of depression. But whether your mood will rule you, or you will rule it is a matter of choice."

In a way, this little yarn is a GREAT story.

(Mrs.) Ruth Dennis Pancera,
Susanville, California.

The Editor
WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza
New York 20, N. Y.

I've just finished reading the March issue, and don't know whether to kiss you or kick you. The stories were good, really enjoyable, but I want to scream and holler protests against the best ones. I mean, of course, Corn Dance, Two Face, and Home to Mother. They are three of the best science fiction stories I've read in a long time, but for Heaven's sake, what are they doing in WEIRD TALES? For 25 years, more or less, I've been reading WEIRD. I've rejoiced in the good years and been patient in the not-so-good ones, to the extent of a basement full of back numbers which I re-read from time to time. I know by now what I like and what I've enjoyed most from you in the past. Ghosties, ghoulies, unseen terrors, warlocks, witches, succubi, and baneful doom are all OK by me, but anti-gravs, blasters, and characters that have to learn all over again how to build a fire because they are so super-efficient they never knew how—Uh uh! Not for WEIRD TALES . . . even when they're good *I don't want them!*

I'm very glad to see you reviving The Eyrie. I enjoy the comments of some of my fellow fen, that is, when they have something to say. I agree about these plus and minus lists, they make the fellows who submitted them sound so stuffed-shirty! Who gives a hoot anyway whether they think one story is an imaginary two points better than another! Either you like 'em or you don't. And I like 'em, especially The Tree's Wife, Shadow of Saturn, and Stay With Me.

Gertrude M. Carr,
3200 Harvard Avenue No.
Seattle 2, Wash.

The Editor
WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza
New York 20, N. Y.

WEIRD TALES for January, 1950 is generally poor. I liked "The Smiling Face"

(Continued on page 94)

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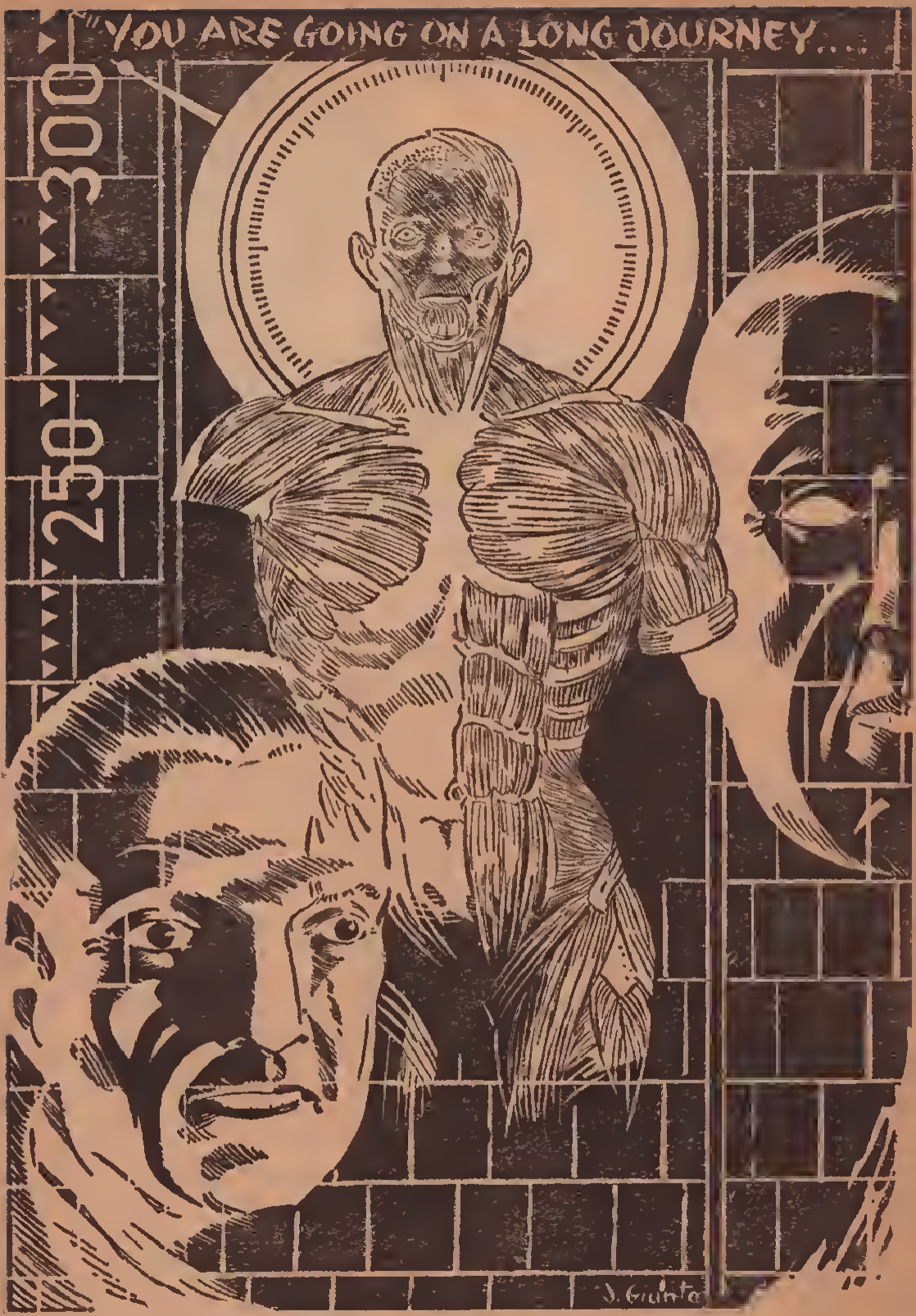
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Scales could tell your weight; could they read your soul?

Tell Your Fortune

By Robert Bloch

THE scales aren't here any more. Look, Buster, I don't want any trouble. I run a nice quiet little place here, no rough stuff. I'm telling you—the scales aren't here. You must be the twentieth guy this week who come in looking for those scales. But they're gone. Damned good thing, too, if you ask me.

No, I'm not the bouncer. I'm the manager. So help me, I am. If you're looking for Big Pete Mosko, he's gone. Tarelli's gone too, and the girl.

Didn't you read about it in the papers? I thought everybody knew it by now, but like I said, guys keep coming in. The heat was on here for a month before I bought the place and made the fix. Now I run it strictly on the percentages; I level with the customers. Not like Mosko, with his crooked wheels and the phoney cubes. Look the house over. No wires, no gimmicks. You want to make a fast buck at the table, you get your chance. But the sucker stuff is out. And I wouldn't be caught dead with those scales in here, after what has happened.

No, I don't think you're nosey. I'll take that drink, sure. Might as well tell you about it. Like I say, it was in the papers—but only part of it. Screwiest thing you ever heard of. Matter of fact, a guy needs a drink or two if he wants to finish the story.

If you come in here in the old days, then you probably remember Big Pete Mosko all right. Six feet four, three hundred pounds, built like a brick backhouse, with that Polack haircut and the bashed-in nose. Don't like to give anyone the finger, but it looks like Pete Mosko had to be that big to hold all the meanness in him. Kind of a guy they'd have to bury with a corkscrew, too. But a very smart apple.

He come here about three years ago when this pitch was nothing but a combination tavern and bowling alley. A Mom and Pop setup, strictly for Saturday nights and a beer license. He made his deal with the county boys and tore out the bowling alley. Put in this layout downstairs here and hired a couple of sticks to run tables. Crap games only, at first. A fast operation.

But Mosko was a smart apple, like I say. The suckers come downstairs here and dropped their bundles one-two-three. Mosko, he stayed upstairs in the bar and made like your genial host. Used to sit there in a big chair with a ten-dollar smile plastered all over his ugly mush. Offering everybody drinks on the house when they come up from the cleaners. Let everybody kid him about how fat he was and how ugly he was and how dumb he was. Mosko dumb? Let me tell you, he knew what he was doing.

Way he worked it, he didn't even need to keep a bouncer on the job. Never any strong-arm stuff, even though business got good and some of the Country Club gang used to come out here and drop maybe a G or so at a time on Saturdays. Mosko saw to that. He was the buffer. A guy got a rimming on Mosko's tables, but he never got sore at Mosko. Mosko stayed upstairs and kidded him along.

Show you how smart he was, Mosko played up his fatness. Played it up so he could be ribbed. Did it on purpose—wearing those big baggy suits to make him look even heavier—and putting that free lunch in front of himself when he sat in his chair at the end of the bar. Mosko wasn't really what you call a big eater, but he kept nib-

Heading by John Giunta

bling away at the food all evening, whenever somebody was around to look. Suffered something awful from indigestion, and he used to complain in private, but he put on a good show for the marks.

That's why he got a scale put in the tavern, to begin with. All a part of Mosko's smart act. He used to weigh himself in front of the suckers. Made little bets—fin or a sawbuck—on what he weighed. Lost them on purpose, too, just to make the marks feel good.

But that was an ordinary scale, understand. And Mosko was running an ordinary place, too—until Tarelli came.

Seems like Mosko wasn't content just to rim suckers on the dice tables. If his appetite for food wasn't so good, he made up for it in his appetite for a fast buck. Anyhow, when he had the bowling alleys ripped out downstairs, the carpenters built him a couple of little rooms, way in back. Rooms to live in.

Of course Mosko himself lived upstairs, over the tavern. These rooms weren't for him. They were for any of Mosko's private pals.

He had a lot of private pals. Old buddies from Division Street in Chi. Fraternity brothers from Joliet. Any lamster was a pal of Mosko's when the heat was on—if he had the moola to pay for hiding out in one of those private rooms downstairs. Mosko picked up a nice hunk of pocket money hiding hot items—and I guess he had visitors from all over the country staying a week or a month in his place. Never asked about it; you didn't ask Mosko about such things if you wanted to keep being a good insurance risk.

Anyhow, it was on account of those rooms that Tarelli come here. He was out of Havana—illegal entry, of course—but he wasn't a Cuban. Eytie, maybe, from the looks of him. Little dark customer with gray hair and big brown eyes, always grinning and mumbling to himself. Funny to see a squirt like him standing next to a big tub of lard like Mosko.

I saw him the day he arrived. I was working for Big Pete Mosko then, bouncing and keeping the customers quiet. Mosko never talked about his little private deals handling hot characters in the back room, and I clammed up whenever I was with him—it was strictly business between us. But even though I kept my mouth shut, I kept my eyes open, and I saw plenty.

Like I say, I saw Tarelli arrive. He got off the five-spot bus right in front of the tavern, just at twilight. I was out front switching on the neon when he ambled up, tapped me on the shoulder, and said, "Pardon. Can you inform me if this is the establishment of Signor Mosko?"

I give him a checkup, a fastie. Funny little guy, about the size of a watch-charm, wearing a set of checkered threads. He carried a big black suitcase, holding it stiff-armed in a way that made it easy to tell he had a full load. He wasn't wearing a hat, and his gray hair was plastered down on his head with some kind of perfume or tonic on it which smelled like DDT and was probably just as deadly.

"Inside, Buster," I told him.

"Pardon?"

"Mosko's inside. Wait, I'll take you." I steered him towards the door.

"Thank you." He gave me the big grin—full 32-tooth salute—and lugged the keister inside after me, mumbling to himself.

WHAT he could possibly want with Mosko I didn't know, but I wasn't being paid to figure it out. I just led him up to Big Pete behind the bar and pointed. Then I went outside again.

Of course, I couldn't help hearing some stuff through the screen door. Mosko had a voice that could kill horse-flies at five hundred feet. He talked and Tarelli mumbled. Something like this:

"Finally made it, huh? Rico fly you in?"

"Mumble-mumble-mumble."

"All set. Where's the cash?"

"Mumble-mumble."

"Okay. Stay as long as you want. Rico tells me you can do a few jobs for me, too."

"Mumble-mumble-mumble."

"Brought your own equipment, eh? That's fine. We'll see how good you are, then. Come on, I'll show you where you'll bunk. But remember, Tarelli—you stay out

of sight when customers are here. Don't want you to show your profile to any strangers. Just stick downstairs and do what you're told and we'll get along fine."

That told me all I needed to know, except what Tarelli was going to do for Big Pete Mosko while he hid out from the law in the basement back rooms. But I found out the rest soon enough.

Couple of days later, I'm downstairs stashing liquor in the storage room and I come back through the crap table layout. First thing I see is a couple of roulette wheels, some hig new tables, and little Tarelli.

Tarelli is sitting on an orange crate, right in the middle of the wheels and furniture, and he's having himself a ball. Got a mess of tools laying around, and a heap more in his big black suitcase. He's wiring the undersides of the tables and using instruments on the wheels, squatting on this crate and grinning like a gnome in Santy Claus's workshop. I hear him mumbling to himself, and I figure it's only sociable I should stop hy and maybe case the job a little.

He pays me no attention at all, just keeps right on with his wiring, soldering connections and putting some small batteries under the wheels. Even though he grins and mumbles, I can tell when I watch his hands that Tarelli knows what he is doing. The little foreign character is a first-class mechanic.

I watch him slip some weights under the rims of the three roulette wheels and it's easy to see that he's bored holes through them for an electric magnet below the Zero and Double-Zero, and then—wham!

Something smacks me in the back of the neck and I hear Big Pete Mosko yelling, "Whaddya think you're doing here? Get out before I break your lousy neck!"

I took the hint and ducked, but I learned something, again. Big Pete Mosko was putting in three crooked roulette wheels, and business was picking up.

Sure enough, less than a week later the tables were installed and ready for action. I kept out of the basement as much as possible, because I could see Mosko didn't want anybody around or asking questions. I made it my business to steer shy of Tarelli, too. There was no sense asking for trouble.

MUST have been all of ten days before I saw him again. This was just after the wheels were operating. Mosko brought in two more sharpies to run them, and he was taking them into town one afternoon, leaving me and the day bartender on duty. I went downstairs to clean up, and I swear I wasn't getting my nose dirty. It was Tarelli who started it.

He heard me walking around, and he come out from his room. "Pardon," he said. "Pardon, signor."

"Sure," I said. "What's the pitch?"

"Ees no pitch. Ees only that I weesh to explain that I am sorry I make trouble between you and Signor Mosko."

"You mean when he caught me watching you? That's all right, Tarelli. He loses his temper—I'm used to it. Guess I shouldn't have butted into his business."

"Ees dirty business. Dirty."

I stared at him. He was grinning and nodding, but he wasn't kidding.

"Feelthy!" He grinned harder. "I hate of myself that I do thees for Signor Mosko. For cheating people. Ees feelthy! That I, Antonio Tarelli, would come to such an end—"

"Take it easy, Buster. We all gotta live."

"You call thees living?" He shrugged at me, at the tables, at the cellar, at the whole damned world. "I come to thees country to make new life. Rico, he tells me I can do good here. Signor Mosko, I pay him the monies, he weel arrange. Ees no good. I am—how you say?—without help. I must do as Signor Mosko tells. He discovers I am craftsman, he makes me do thees dirty work."

"Why don't you blow out of here, then? I mean, it's none of my business, but why don't you just scram right this afternoon? Even if Mosko plays it below the belt and hollers copper, you can get away into town and take a room. Nobody would find you. Lotsa guys in this country on illegal entry; they make out. Like I say, Tarelli, I'm not trying to advise you. But if you don't like

crooked dealing, better leave and leave fast. How about it?"

TARELLI cocked his head up at me and grinned again. Then he squeezed my arm.

"You know sometheeng? I like you. You are honest man."

That was a laugh. But who was I to argue with a dumb foreigner? I just grinoed back.

"Look," he mumbled. "Come, I show you why I not leave here right away now."

He took me down to his little room—an ordinary little room, with a rickety old bed, a straight chair, a second-hand dresser, and a dirty rug on the floor. "Come een," he said, and I stepped inside.

I wish somebody had cut my legs off, instead.

Tarelli went to the closet and dragged out his big black suitcase. He opened it up and pulled something out—a little picture, in a frame.

"Look," he said, and I looked.

I wish somebody had torn my eyes out, instead.

"Rosa," he mumbled. "Ees my daughter. Eighteen years. You like?"

I liked, and I said so.

I wish somebody had cut my tongue off, instead.

But I walked into his little room and looked at the girl with the black hair and the black eyes, and I told him she was beautiful and I sat there staring at her and he grinned and he spilled it all out to me. Everything.

I can remember almost every word, just as I can remember almost everything that happened from that afternoon on until the end.

Yeah, I learned a lot. Too much.

Let me boil it down, though. About Tarelli—he wasn't a lamster, in the old country. He was a Professor. Sounds screwy, but the way he pitched it, I knew he was levelling with me. He was a Professor in some big college over there, university, I don't know what they call it. Had to blow during the war, got as far as Cuba, got mixed up in some mess down there, and then met Big Pete Mosko's pal, Rico. Rico got him into this country, which is what he wanted, and now he was looking for a way to latch onto a bundle.

"I am what you call financial embarrass," he said. "Rico, for breenging me here take all I have save up."

This I could understand. Any pal of Big Pete Mosko would be apt to be like that. A grabber.

"So now I work. Mosko employs the physicist, the most eminent of metaphysicians, to—rig, they say it?—games of chance. Ha! But I weel do anytheeng to earn money, to have Rosa here."

The deal was all set, I gathered. All Tarelli needed to do was scrape together a G-note and Rico would fetch Rosa on the plane. Easy as goniffing candy from a brat.

"So you're saving your pennies, huh?" I said, taking another look at Rosa's picture. "What's Mosko paying you for this machine job?"

"Twenty dollar."

Twenty dollars for a piece of work Mosko would have to pay easy two-three grand for if he got it dooe by any professional. Twenty dollars for three crooked wheels that would pay off maybe a grand or more a week clear profit. Big-hearted guy, Mister Mosko. Aod at that rate, Tarelli would have his Rosa over here just in time to collect on her old-age pension.

I took another look at Rosa's picture and decided it wasn't fair to make poor old Tarelli wait that loog. Matter of fact, I dido't want to wait that long, either.

It wouldn't do much good to tell Tarelli that Mosko was playing him for a sucker. The thing to do was figure an angle, and fast.

I put Rosa's picture away. "We'll work something out," I said. "We got to."

"Thank you," said Tarelli.

Which was a funny thiog for him to say, because I was talking to the picture.

II

I DIDN'T have much time to talk to pictures the next couple weeks. Because Mosko had his roulette wheels operating,

and the take was good. I kept busy quieting the squawkers, hustling out the phonies, and handling the guys who were sauced up. The two hotshots he hired to handle the wheels kept rolling.

Mosko was busy, too—just sitting in his office and counting the take. Must have been about two-three weeks after the wheels went in that I happened to pass his little private back office when Tarelli went in and gave him a pitch.

I couldn't help but hear what they were saying, because both of them were yelling pretty loud.

"But you promise," Tarelli was saying. "Rosa, she ees all alone. Ees not good for young girl to be alone. She must come here."

"That's your worry. Blow now, I got things to do."

"Theengs to do like counteeng monies? Monies you make from the crooked wheels I feex?"

"Never mind. Get outta here before I lose my temper."

"Ees worth plenty, thees job I do for you. Get Rosa for me. I pay you back. I work long, hard. Anytheeng you say."

"Blow."

"You must do sometheeng. You must!" Tarelli was almost bawling, now. "How you like, I tell somebody about crooked wheels?"

"Listen. One peep outta you and I tell somebody," said Big Pete Mosko. "I tell somebody about a guy who sneaked into this country without a passport. Get me?"

"You would not do thees!"

"Wait and see."

Everything was quiet for a minute. Way I figured it, things would stay quiet. Mosko had Tarelli, but good. If the little guy didn't watch his step, Mosko could turn him over to the Feds. There was nothing anybody could do about it. Except—

"One theeng more—" Tarelli said.

"Blow."

"No. Leesten. Suppose I construct for you something very special?"

"How special?"

"Sometheeng—how can I tell you?—no one ever has before."

"Gambling device?"

"Perhaps."

"Cost money to make?"

"A few pennies."

"New, huh?"

"Special."

"All right, go ahead. We'll see."

"Then you weel send for Rosa?"

"We'll see."

Mosko let it go at that, and I didn't butt in. I was willing to see, too. And in another couple of weeks, I saw.

I was there the morning Tarelli took the wraps off his big secret. It was on a Sunday, and Mosko and the four sharpies who worked his wheels for him were downstairs, divvying up the take from the big Saturday night play.

Me and Al, the bartender, were sitting around in the tavern upstairs all alone, chopping the heads off a couple glasses of beer. There weren't any customers—never were on Sunday—so Al looked kind of surprised when he saw this little truck drive up and stop outside.

"We got company," he said.

"Company? Why, it's Tarelli," I told him.

SURE enough, little Tarelli hopped out of the truck and made some motions to the big lug who was driving it. The lug went around back and then he and Tarelli lifted down a big weighing machine. Before I knew what was happening, they dragged it into the tavern and set it up right in the corner.

"Hey," says Al. "Whatsa big idea?"

"Ees no idea. Ees scales. For weighing," Tarelli said, turning on his grin.

"Who ordered scales around here?"

Al come around the bar and we walked up to the weighing machine.

"I order," Tarelli told him. "I promise Mistair Mosko to find sometheeng wonderful."

"Don't see anything wonderful about a penny scale machine," I said, giving it a fast case.

And there wasn't anything wonderful to see. It was just a regular weighing machine with a round clock-face glass front, and a

pointer that spun up to 400 pounds, depending on who stood on it and dropped a penny in the slot. It was made by the Universal Scale Company of Waterville, Indiana, and the decal on the back said, "This machine property of Acme Coin Machine Distributors."

I NOTICED all this stuff kind of quick, without paying too much attention—but later, I memorized it. Checked up on it, too, when the time came, and it was all true. Just an ordinary weighing machine, made at the factory and rented out to Mosko for ten bucks a month plus 30 per cent of the take in pennies.

Oh, one other thing. Besides the big glass front over the dial showing the weight, there was another little hunk of glass and a spinner knob you turned when you dropped your penny. This knob turned about 20 slides up, for fortune-telling. You know, the regular questions you always find on scales. Like, "WILL I MARRY RICH?" Then when you dropped your penny, out comes a card with a gag answer on it, like "NO, YOU WON'T MARRY RICH. YOU'LL MARRY EDDIE." Corny stuff. And on top of the machine it said, "TELL YOUR FORTUNE—1¢. HONEST WEIGHT, NO SPRINGS."

Al and I looked at the scales and the guy driving the truck went away from there. Tarelli kept grinning up at us and at last he said, "How you like?"

"Phooey!" said Al. "Whatsa matter with you, Tarelli? You oughtta know better'n to louse up the joint with a penny machine. We got customers come in here to drop a big wad at the tables; you think they gonna fish out pennies to get their weight told?"

"Yeah," I said. "Does Mosko know you ordered this?"

"No," Tarelli answered. "But he find out fast."

"And he'll get sore faster," I told him.

"No he don't. You see."

"I'm gonna hate to see, Tarelli. When Big Pete sees this phoney fortune-telling gimmick he'll go through the roof. He thought you were coming through with something big."

"Right. Thees ees of the most wonderful. Wait until I feex."

Tarelli waved at me and went downstairs. Al and I got back to our beers. Every once in a while Al would look over at the big, ugly white scales in the corner and shake his head. Neither of us said anything, though.

In a little while Tarelli come upstairs again. This time he was lugging his suitcase and a big canvas tarp. He set his suitcase down right next to the scales and then he got out a hammer and nailed up the tarp, right across the corner. It hid the scales and it hid Tarelli and his suitcase.

"Hey, now what you up to?" Al yelled.

"No questions. I feex. You cannot see."

"Lissen, you sawed-off little jerk—who you giving orders to around here?" Al hollered.

He got up, but I held his arm. "Take it easy," I said. "Give the little guy a chance. He's doing this for Mosko, remember? Maybe he's got some angle. Look what he did for the wheels."

"All right. But what's the big idea of the tarpaulin?"

"Secret," Tarelli called out. "Nobody must know. Three weeks I work to do. Ees miracle. You see."

We didn't see anything. We didn't even hear much of anything; some banging and clanking around, but not much. I guessed Tarelli was working on the weighing-machine with special tools from his suitcase, but I couldn't figure the angle. All I know is he worked on and on, and Al and I kept drinking beers and waiting for Big Pete Mosko to come upstairs and bust up the act.

But Mosko must have been plenty busy counting the take. He didn't show. And the fidgeting went on behind the curtain until Al and I were going screwy trying to figure things out.

"I got it!" Al says, at last. "Sure, I got it. Plain as daylight. Tarelli fixed the wheels downstairs for the big-time marks, diden' he? Well, this is for the little sucker—Mr. Bates, who comes in upstairs for a drink. We work the old routine on him, see? Plant a steerer at the bar, get him into an argu-

ment about what he weighs, work him into a bet. Five, ten, twenty bucks. I hold the dough, get it? Then we take him over to the scales. Mr. Bates knows what he weighs, because before the showdown the steerer goes away to wash his hands, and I say to Mr. Bates, 'Quick, hop on the scales before he gets back. Then we'll know what you weigh for sure.' So the chump weighs himself and lets say he weighs 165. The steerer comes back and this time Mr. Bates offers to double or triple the bet. He can't lose, see? So the steerer falls for it and we have Mr. Bates for fifty or a hundred bucks. Then we weigh him official. And of course the scales says 170 or 175—whatever I want. Because I got my foot down on the pedal that fixes the scales. Get it? A natural!"

Somehow it didn't seem like such a natural to me. In the first place, no Mr. Bates was going to be dumb enough not to see through the routine with the crooked scales, and he'd raise a holy stink about being cleaned. Secondly, Tarelli had promised Mosko something really wonderful. And for some funny reason I had faith in Tarelli. I knew he was working to get Rosa over here—and he'd do anything for her. After seeing her picture, I could understand that. No, I expected Tarelli to come through. A big scientist, physicist or whatever kind of Professor he was in the old country, would do better than fix a weighing machine.

SO I WAITED to see what would happen when Tarelli finished and took the tarp down.

Finally he did, and I saw—exactly nothing. Tarelli ripped down the canvas, carried his bag back downstairs, and left the scales standing there, exactly like before. I know, because Al and I rushed up to look at the machine.

Only two things were changed, and you had to look pretty hard to realize that much. First of all, the little selector knob you could spin to choose your fortune-telling question just didn't spin any more. And second, the small glass-covered opening above it which gave the questions was now blank. Instead of printed questions like "WILL I MARRY RICH?" there was now a sort of black disk behind the glass. It kind of moved when you got up close to it, as though it was a mirror, only black.

I know that sounds screwy and it was screwy; but that's the only way I can describe it. It was a little black disk that sort of caught your reflection when you stood on the scales, only of course you can't get a reflection off something dull and black.

But it was as if the scales were *looking at you.*

I hopped up and fished around for a penny. Closer I stood, the more I felt like something or somebody inside the scales was giving me a cold, fishy stare. Yes, and there was, come to think of it, a soft humming noise when I stood on the platform. Deep down humming from inside.

Al went around back and said, "Little jerk opened up the machinery here, all right. Soldered the back on tight again, though. Wonder what he was up to? Coin company's sure gonna squawk when they see this."

I found my penny and got ready to drop it in. I could see my reflection in the big glass dial where the weight pointer was. I had a kind of funny grin, but I guess that came from looking at the black disk below and listening to the humming and wondering about the wonderful thing Tarelli had done.

I held my penny over the slot, and—

Big Pete Mosko come running up the stairs. Tarelli was right behind him, and right behind Tarelli were the four sharpies.

"What's the pitch?" Mosko yelled. "Get off that machine and throw it out of here."

I got off the machine, fast. If I hadn't, Mosko would of knocked me off.

"Wait," Tarelli chattered. "Wait—you see—ees what I promise you. Wonderful."

"Scales!" Mosko grabbed Tarelli by the collar and shook him until his hair flopped all over his face. "What do I need with scales?"

"But they tell fortunes—"

"Tell fortunes?" Mosko began to shake Tarelli until it looked like his hair would be torn right out of his head. "What do I need with phoney fortunes?"

"Ees—ees not phoney fortunes like you

say. That ees the wonderful. The fortunes, they are true!"

"True?"

Mosko was still yelling, but the shaking stopped. He put Tarelli down and stared at him, hard.

Tarelli managed another one of his grins. "Yes, true. You get on machine. You put een penny. Fortune card comes out. Ees really true fortune. Tell your future."

"Malarkey!"

One of the sharpies, character named Don, started to laugh. He was a lanky blond guy with buck teeth, and he looked like a horse. In a minute we were all laughing. All but Tarelli.

"Take it easy, Tarelli," said Don, grinning and sticking out his big yellow teeth. He walked over to the little old man and stood looking down at him. It was funny to see the two of them together; Tarelli in his old overalls, and this sharpie Don in a handsome set of threads; new blue pinstripe job that matched the color of his convertible parked outside in the driveway. It was funny, and then it wasn't so funny, because the grin on Don's face was mean, and I knew he was just working up to something nasty.

"Look, Tarelli," Don said, still grinning. "Maybe you're a big scientist back in the University of Boloney or wherever you come from. But for my money, over here, you're just a schmoe, see? And I never heard that any scientist could invent a machine that really reads a person's future." Don reached down and patted Tarelli on the shoulder. "Now you know Mister Mosko here is a busy man," he said. "So if you got anything else to say, spit it out fast-like. Then I won't waste any more time before I kick you out in the road."

"Huh!" Mosko grunted. "I got no time for screwballs at all, Don. Telling what's gonna happen to you by science—"

"Ees not science." Tarelli talked real soft and looked at the floor.

"Not science?"

"No. I do anytheeng to get Rosa here, remember, I tell you that? I do what science cannot do. I make pact. Make vow. Make bargain."

"What kind of a bargain? With who?"

"I not say. My business, eh? But eet work. So I can build what I need for machine. Ees not science work here. Ees magic."

"What the—"

Mosko was yelling again, but Tarelli's soft voice cut him right off. "Magic," he repeated. "Black magic. I don' care who you are, what you are. You get on scales. Scales read your soul, your past, see you like you really are. Drop penny, scales tell your fortune. Read your future. Here, try eet—you see."

Then Don cut loose with his horse-laugh. Only this time he laughed alone. And when he shut up, Tarelli turned to Mosko again.

"Understan' what I tell you? Thees scale read the future. Tell anybody's fortune. Ees worth much money to have here. You can make beeg business from thees. Now you get Rosa for me?"

"Sure," said Mosko. "I'll get Rosa. If it works. Hey, Tarelli, whyn-cha get on the machine and see if it tells your fortune about Rosa? Maybe it'll say she's coming. Ha!"

Mosko was ribbing him, but Tarelli didn't know it. He turned kind of pale and stepped back.

"Oh no, Meestair Mosko. Not me! I not get on thees machine for anytheeng. Ees cursed, black magic. I do it only for Rosa—but I fear."

"Well, what we all wasting time standing around for?" Don snickered. "Tarelli's chicken. Afraid he'll get on the scales and nothing will happen, so we boot him out. Well, I'm not scared. Here, gimme that."

He snatched the penny out of my hand, hopped on the scales, and slid the penny down. I could hear the faint humming, and then when the penny disappeared I could hear the humming a little louder. The black disk on the scales got cloudy for a second. The pointer on the big dial behind the glass swung over to 182. Don stood on the scales, 182 pounds of what the well-dressed man will wear, including his nasty grin.

"So?" he shrugged "Nothing happens."

There was a click, and a little white card slid out of the slot below the black disk.

Don picked it up and read it. He shook his head and passed the card to Mosko and the others. Eventually it got to me.

It was a plain white card with plain lettering on it—but it wasn't regular printing, more like a mimeograph in black ink that was still damp. I read it twice.

WHEN THE BLACK CAT CROSSES YOUR PATH YOU DIE.

That's all it said. The old superstition. Kid stuff.

"Kid stuff!" Don sneered. "Tell you what. This faker musta gummed up the machinery in this scale and put in a lot of phoney new fortune-telling cards of his own. He's crazy."

Tarelli shook his head. "Please," he said. "You no like me. Well, I no like you, much. But even so, I geev you the warning—watch out for black cats. Scales say black cat going to breeng you death. Watch out."

Don shrugged. "You handle this deal, Mosko," he said. "I got no more time to waste. Heavy date this afternoon."

Mosko nodded at him. "Just make sure you don't get loaded. I need you at the tables tonight."

"I'll be here," Don said, from the doorway. "Unless some mangy alley-cat sneaks up and conks me over the head with a club."

For a little while nobody said anything. Tarelli tried to smile at me, but it didn't go over. He tugged at Mosko's sleeve but Mosko ignored him. He stared at Don. We all stared at Don.

We watched him climb into his convertible and back out of the driveway. We watched him give it the gun and he hit the road. We watched him race by towards town. We watched the black cat come out of nowhere and scoot across the highway, watched Don yank the wheel to swerve out of its path, watched the car zoom off to one side towards the ditch, watched it crash into the culvert, then turn a somersault and go rolling over and over and over into the gully.

There was running and yelling and swearing and tugging and hauling, and finally we found all that was left of 182 pounds and a brand new suit under the weight of that wrecked convertible. We never saw Don's grin again, and we never saw the cat again, either.

But Tarelli pointed at the fortune-telling card and smiled. And that afternoon, Big Pete Mosko phoned Rico to bring Rosa to America.

III

SHE arrived on Saturday night. Rico bronght her from the plane; big Rico with his waxed mustache and plastered-down hair, with his phoney diamond ring and his phoney polo coat that told everybody what he was, just as if he had a post office reader pinned to his back.

But I didn't pay any attention to Rico. I was looking at Rosa. There was nothing phoney about her black hair, her white skin, her red mouth. There was nothing phoney about the way she threw herself into Tarelli's arms, kissing the little man and crying for joy.

It was quite a reunion downstairs in the back room, and even though she paid no attention when she was introduced to me, I felt pretty good about it all. It did something to me just to watch her smiling and laughing, a few minutes later, while she talked to her old man. Al, the bartender, and the sharpies stood around and grinned at each other, too, and I guess they felt the same way I did.

But Big Pete Mosko felt different. He looked at Rosa, too, and he did his share of grinning. But he wasn't grinning at her—he was grinning at something inside himself. Something came alive in Mosko, and I could see it—something that waited to grab and paw and rip and tear at Rosa.

"It's gonna be nice having you here," he told her. "We gotta get acquainted."

"I must thank you for making this possible," she said, in her soft little voice—the kid spoke good English, grammar and everything, and you could tell she had class. "My father and I are very, very grateful. I don't know how we are going to repay you."

"We'll talk about that later," said Big Pete Mosko, licking his lips and letting his hands curl and uncurl into fists. "But right

now you gotta excuse me. Looks like a beavy night for business."

Tarelli and Rosa disappeared into his room, to have supper off a tray Al brought down. Mosko went out to the big downstairs pitch to case the tables for the night's play. Rico hung around for a while, kidding with the wheel operators. I caught him mumbling in the corner and dragged him upstairs for a drink.

That's where Mosko found us a couple minutes later. Rico gave him the office.

"How's about the dough?" he said.

"Sure, sure. Justa minute." Mosko hauled out a roll and peeled off a slice for Rico. I saw it—five Cs. And it gave me a bad time to watch Rico take the money because I knew Mosko wouldn't hand out five hundred bucks without getting plenty in return.

And I knew what he wanted in return. Rosa.

"Hey, what's the big idea of this?" Rico asked, pointing over at the scales in the corner.

I didn't say anything, and I wondered if Mosko would spill. All week long the weighing machine had stood there with a sign on it, "OUT OF ORDER." Mosko had it lettered the day after Don got killed, and he made sure nobody got their fortune told. Nobody talked about the scales, and I kept wondering if Mosko was going to yank the machine out of the place or use it, or what he had in the back of his head.

But Mosko must have figured Rico was one of the family, seeing as how he flew in illegal immigrants and all, because he told Rico the whole story. There wasn't many around the bar yet that early—our Saturday night players generally got in about ten or so—and Mosko yapped without worrying about listeners.

"So help me, it'sa truth," he told Rico. "Machine'll tell just what's gonna happen to your future. For a stinkin' penny."

Rico laughed.

"Don't give me that con," he said. "Business with Don and the cat was just a whatchacallit—coincidence."

"Yeah? Well, you couldn't get me on those scales for a million bucks, brother," Mosko told him.

"Maybe so. But I'm not scared of any machine in the world," Rico snorted. "Here, watch me."

And he walked over to the scales and dropped a penny. The pointer went up. 177. The black disk gleamed. I heard the humming and the click, and out came the white card. Rico looked at it and grinned. I didn't crack a smile. I was thinking of Don.

But Rico chuckled and handed the card around for all of us to see. It said:

YOU WILL WIN WITH RED

"Good enough," he said, waving the card under Mosko's nose. "Now if I was a sucker, I'd go downstairs and bet this five hundred smackers on one of your crooked wheels, red to win. If I was a superstitious jerk, that is."

Mosko shrugged. "Suit yourself," he said. "Look, customers. I gotta get busy." He walked away.

I got busy myself, then. The marks started to arrive and it looked like a big Saturday night. I didn't get downstairs until after midnight and that was the first time I noticed that Rico must have kidded himself into believing the card after all.

Because he was playing the wheel. And playing it big. A new guy, name of Spencer, had come in to replace Don, and he was handling the house end on this particular setup. A big crowd was standing around the rig, watching Rico place his bets. Rico had a stack of chips a foot high and he was playing them fast.

And winning.

I must have watched him for about fifteen minutes, and during that time he raked in over three Gs, cold. Played odds, played numbers. Played red, and played black too. Won almost every spin.

Mosko was watching, too. I saw him signal Spencer the time Rico put down a full G in blue chips on black to win. I saw Spencer wink at Mosko. But I saw the wheel stop on black.

Mosko was ready to bust, but what could he do? A crowd of marks was watching,

it had to look legit. Three more spins and Rico had about six or seven Gs in chips in front of him. Then Mosko stepped in and took the table away from Spencer.

"See you in my office," he mumbled, and Spencer nodded. He stared at Rico but Rico only smiled and said, "Excuse me, I'm cashing in." Mosko looked at me and said, "Tail him." Then he shook his head. "Don't get it," he said. He was working the wire now, finding everything in order.

OUT of the corner of my eye I saw Rico over at the cashier's window, counting currency and stuffing it into his pocket. Spencer had disappeared. Rico began walking upstairs, his legs scissoring fast. I followed, hefting the brass knucks in my pocket.

Rico went outside. I went outside. He heard my feet behind him on the gravel and turned around.

"Hey," I said. "What's your hurry?"

Rico just laughed. Then he winked. That wink was the last thing I saw before everything exploded.

I went down on the gravel, and I didn't get up for about a minute. Then I was just in time to see the car pull away with Rico waving at me, still laughing. The guy who had sapped me was now at the wheel of the car. I recognized Spencer.

"It's a frame, is it?" Big Pete Mosko had come up from downstairs and was standing behind me, spitting out pieces of his cigar. "If I'da know what those dirty rats would pull on me—he was working with Spencer to trim me—"

"You did know," I reminded him.

"Did I?"

"Sure. Remember what the fortune-telling card said? Told Rico, 'YOU WILL WIN WITH RED', didn't it?"

"But Rico was winning with both colors," Mosko yelled. "It was that dog Spencer who let him win."

"That's what the card said," I told him. "What you and I forget is that 'Red' is Spencer's nickname."

We went back inside because there was nothing else to do—no way of catching Rico or Spencer without rough stuff and Mosko couldn't afford that. Mosko went back to the tables and took the suckers for a couple hours straight, but it didn't make him any happier.

He was still in a lousy temper the next morning when he cut up the week's take. It was probably the worst time in the world to talk to him about anything—and that's, of course, where Tarelli made his mistake.

I was sitting downstairs when Tarelli came in with Rosa and said, "Please, Meestair Mosko."

"Whatcha want?" Mosko would have yelled it if Rosa hadn't been there, looking cool and sweet in a black dress that curved in and out and in again.

"I want to know if Rosa and I, we can go now?"

"Go?"

"Yes. Away from here. Into town, to stay. For Rosa to get job, go to school nights maybe."

"You ain't goin' no place, Tarelli."

"But you have what you weesh, no? I feex machines. I make for you the marvelous scale of fortune, breeng you luck—"

"Luck?" Rosa or no Rosa, Mosko began to yell. He stood up and shoved his purple face right against Tarelli's button nose. "Luck, huh? You and your lousy machine—in one week it kills my best wheel man, and lets another one frame me with Rico for over seven grand! That's the kind of luck you bring me with your magic! You're gonna stick here, Tarelli, like I say, unless you want Uncle Sam on your tail, but fast!"

"Please, Meestair Mosko—you let Rosa go alone, huh?"

"Not on your life!" He grinned, then. "I wouldn't let a nice girl like Rosa go up into town without nobody to protect her. Don't you worry about Rosa, Tarelli. I got plans for her. Lotsa plans."

Mosko turned back to the table and his money. "Now, blow and lemme alone," he said.

They left. I went along, too, because I didn't like to leave Rosa out of my sight now.

"What is this all about, Father?" Rosa asked the question softly as we all three of us sat in Tarelli's little room.

Tarelli looked at me and shrugged.

"Tell her," I said. "You must."

So Tarelli explained about being here illegally and about the phoney roulette wheels.

"But the machine—the scales of fortune, what do you mean by this?"

Again Tarelli looked at me. I didn't say anything. He sighed and stared down at the floor. But at last, he told her.

A lot of it I didn't understand. About photo-electric cells and mirrors and a tripping lever he was supposed to have invented. About books with funny names and drawing circles in rooster blood and something called evocations or invocations or whatever they call it. And about a bargain with Sathanas, whoever that is. That must have been the magic part.

I guessed it was, because of the way Rosa acted when she heard it. She turned pale and began to stare and breathe funny, and she stood up and shook Tarelli's shoulders.

"No—you did not do this thing! You couldn't! It is evil, and you know the price—"

"Nigromancy, that ees all I can turn to to get you here," Tarelli said. "I do anytheeng for you, Rosa. No cost too much."

"It is evil," Rosa said. "It must not be permitted. I will destroy it."

"But Mosko, he owns the machine now. You cannot—"

"He said himself it brought bad luck. And he will never know. I will replace it with another scale, an ordinary one from the same place you got this. But your secret, the fortune-telling mechanism, must go."

"Rosa," I said, "you can't. He's a dangerous customer. Look, why don't you and your old man scram out of here today? I'll handle Mosko, somehow. He'll be sore, sure, but I'll cool him off. You can hide out in town, and I'll join you later. Please, Rosa, listen to me. Look, kid, I'll level with you. I'm crazy about you. I'll do anything for you, that's why I want you to go. Leave Mosko to me."

She smiled, then, and stared up into my eyes. She stood very close and I could smell her hair. Almost she touched me. And then she shook her head. "You are a good man," she said. "It is a brave thing you propose. But I cannot go. Not yet. Not while that machine of evil still exists. It will bring harm into the world, for my father did a wicked thing when he trafficked with darkness to bring it into being. He did it for me, so I am in a way responsible. And I must destroy it."

"But how? When?

"Tonight," Rosa said. "Tomorrow we will order a new scale brought in. But we must remove the old one tonight."

"Tarelli," I said. "Could you put the regular parts back in this machine if you take out the new stuff?"

"Yes."

"Then that's what we'll do. Too dangerous to try a switch. Just stick the old fortune-telling gimmick back in and maybe we can get by for a while without Mosko noticing. He won't be letting anybody near it now for a while, after what happened."

"Good," said Tarelli. "We find a time."

"Tonight," Rosa repeated. "There must be no more cursed fortunes told."

But she was wrong.

IV

SHE was wrong about a lot of things. Like Mosko not having any use for the fortune-telling scales, for instance. He lied when he told Tarelli the machine was useless.

I found that out later the same afternoon, when Mosko cornered me upstairs in the bar. He'd been drinking a little and trying to get over his grouch about the stolen money.

"I'll get it back," he said. "Got a gold mine here. Bigges' gold mine inna country. Only nobody knows it yet but you and me." He laughed, and the bottles rattled behind the bar. "If that dumb guy only could figure it, he'd go crazy."

"Something worked up for the fortune-telling?" I needled.

"Sure. Look, now. I get rich customers in here, plenty of 'em. Lay lotsa dough onna line downstairs. Gamblers, plungers, superstitious. You see 'em come in. Rattling lucky charms and rabbits-foots and four leaf

clovers. Playin' numbers like 7 and 13 on hunches. What you think? Wouldn't they pay plenty for a chance to know what's gonna happen to them tomorrow or next year? Why it's a natural, that's what—I can charge plenty to give 'em a fortune from the scales. Tell you what, I'm gonna have a whole new setup just for this deal. Tomorrow we build a new special room, way in back. I got a pitch figured out, how to work it. We'll set the scales up tomorrow, lock the door of the new room, and then we really operate."

I listened and nodded, thinking about how there wasn't going to be any tomorrow. Just tonight.

I did my part. I kept pouring the drinks into Mosko, and after supper he had me drive him into town. There wasn't any play on the wheels on Monday, and Mosko usually hit town on his night off to relax. His idea of relaxation was a little poker game with the boys from the City Hall—and tonight I was hot to join him.

We played until almost one, and I kept him interested as long as I could, knowing that Rosa and Tarelli would be working on the machine back at the tavern. But it couldn't last forever, and then we were driving back and Big Pete Mosko was mumbling next to me in the dark.

"Only the beginning, boy," he said. "Gonna make a million off that scales. Talk about fortunes—I got one wheo I got hold of Tarelli! A million smackers and the girl. Hey, watch it!"

I almost drove the car off the road when he mentioned the girl. I wish I had, now.

"Tarelli's a brainy apple," Mosko mumbled. "Dumb, but brainy—you know what I mean. I betcha he's got some other cute tricks up his sleeve, too. Whatcha think? You believe that stuff about magic, or is it just a machine?"

"I don't know," I told him. "I don't know nothing about science, or magic, either. All I know is, it works. And it gives me the creeps just to think about it—the scales sort of look at you, size you up, and then give you a payoff. And it always comes true." I began to pitch, then. "Mosko, that thing's dangerous. It can make you a lot of trouble. You saw what it did to Don, and what happened to you when Rico had his fortune told. Why don't you get rid of it before something else happens? Why don't you let Tarelli and Rosa go and forget about it?"

"You going soft inna head?" Mosko grabbed my shoulder and I almost went off the road again. "Leave go of a million bucks and a machine that tells the truth about the future? Not me, buddy! And I want Tarelli, too. But most of all I want Rosa. And I'm gonna get her. Soon. Maybe—tonight."

What I wanted to do to Big Pete Mosko would have pinned a murder rap on me for sure. I had to have time to think, to figure out some other angle. So I kept driving, kept driving until we pulled up outside the dark entrance to the tavern.

Everything was quiet, and I couldn't see any light, so I figured whatever Rosa and Tarelli had done was finished. We got out and Mosko unlocked the froot door. We walked in.

Then everything happened at once.

I heard the clicking noise from the corner. Mosko heard it, too. He yelled and grabbed at something in the dark. I heard a crash, heard Tarelli curse in Italian. Mosko stepped back.

"No you don't!" he hollered. He had a gun, the gun had a bullet, the bullet had a target.

That's all.

Mosko shot, there was a scream and a thud, and then I got the lights on and I could see.

I could see Tarelli standing there next to the scales. I could see the tools scattered around and I could see the queer-looking hunk of flashing mirrors that must have been Tarelli's secret machinery. I could see the old back of the scales, already screwed into place again.

But I didn't look at these things, and neither did Mosko and neither did Tarelli.

We looked at Rosa, lying on the floor.

Rosa looked back, but she didn't see us, because she had a bullet between her eyes.

"Dead!" Tarelli screamed. "You murder her!"

Mosko blinked, but he didn't move. "How was I to know?" he said. "Thought somebody was busting into the place. What's the big idea, anyhow?"

"Ees no idea. You murder her."

Mosko had his angle figured, now. He sneered down at Tarelli. "You're a fine one to talk, you lousy little crook! I caught you in the act, didn't I—tryin' to steal the works, that's what you was doing. Now get busy and put that machinery back into the scales before I blow your brains out."

Tarelli looked at Mosko, then at Rosa. All at once he shrugged and picked the little box of mirrors and flashing disks from the floor. It was small, but from the way he hefted it I could tell it was heavy. When he held it, it hummed and the mirrors began to slide every which way, and it hurt my eyes to look at it.

Tarelli lifted the box full of science, the box full of magic, whatever it was; the box of secrets, the box of the future. Then he smiled at Mosko and opened his arms.

The box smashed to the floor.

There was a crash, and smoke, and a bright light. Then the noise and smoke and light went away, and there was nothing but old Tarelli standing in a little pile of twisted wires and broken glass and tubes.

Mosko raised his gun. Tarelli stared straight into the muzzle and grinned.

"You murder me too now, eh? Go 'head, Meestair Mosko. Rosa dead, the fortune-telling maching dead, too, and I do not weesh to stay alive either. Part of me dies with Rosa, and the rest—the rest was machine."

"Machine?" I whispered under my breath, but he heard me.

"Yes. Part of me went to make machine. What you call the soul."

Mosko tightened his finger on the trigger. "Never mind that, you crummy little rat! You can't scare me with none of that phoney talk about magic."

"I don't scare you. You are too stupid to un'rstand. But before I die I tell you one theeng more. I tell your fortune. And your fortune is—death. You die too, Meestair Mosko. You die, too!"

Like a flash Tarelli stooped and grabbed the wrench from the tools at his feet. He lifted it and swung—and then Mosko let him have it. Three slugs in a row.

Tarelli toppled over next to Rosa. I stepped forward. I don't know what I'd of done next—jumped Mosko, tried to kill him with his own gun. I was in a daze.

Mosko turned around and barked. "Quit staring," he said. "Help me clean up this mess and get rid of them, fast. Or do you wanna get tied in as an accessory for murder?"

That word, "murder"—it stopped me cold. Mosko was right. I'd be in on the deal if they found the bodies. Rosa was dead, Tarelli was dead, the scales and their secret was gone.

So I helped Mosko.

I helped him clean up, and I helped him load the bodies into the car. He didn't ask me to go along with him on the trip, and that was good.

Because it gave me a chance, after he'd gone, to go to the phone and ring up the Sheriff. It gave me a chance to tell the Sheriff and the two deputies the whole story when they came out to the tavern early in the morning. It gave me a chance to see Big Pete Mosko's face when he walked in and found us waiting for him there.

THEY collared him and accused him and he denied everything. He must of hid the bodies in a good safe place, to pull a front act like that, but he never cracked. He denied everything. My story, the murders, the works.

"Look at him," he told the Sheriff, pointing at me. "He's shakin' like a leaf. Outta his head. Everybody knows he's punchy. Why the guy's off his rocker—spilling a yarn like that! Magic scales that tell your fortune! Ever hear of such a thing? Why that alone ought to show you the guy's slug-nutty."

Funny thing is, I could see him getting to them. The Sheriff and his buddies began to give me a look out of the corner of their eyes.

"First of all," said Mosko, "There never was no such person as Tarelli, and he never

had a daughter. Look around—see if you can find anything that looks like we had a fight in here, let alone a double murder. All you'll see is the scales here. The rest this guy made up out of his cracked head."

"About those scales—" the Sheriff began.

Mosko walked over and put his hand on the side of the big glass dial on top of the scales, bold as you please. "Yeah, what about the scales?" he asked. "Look 'em over. Just ordinary scales. See for yourself. Drop a penny, out comes a fortune. Regular stuff. Wait, I'll show you."

WE ALL looked at Mosko as he climbed up on the scales and fumbled in his pocket for a penny. I saw the deputies edge closer to me, just waiting for the payoff.

And I gulped. Because I knew the magic was gone. Tarelli had put the regular works back into the scales and it was just an ordinary weighing machine, now. HONEST WEIGHT, NO SPRINGS. Mosko would dial a fortune and one of the regular printed cards would come out.

We'd hidden the bodies, cleaned up Tarelli's room, removed his clothes, the tools, everything. No evidence left, and nobody would talk except me. And who would believe me, with my crazy guff about a magic scales that told the real future? They'd lock me up in the nut-house, fast, when Mosko got off the scales with his fortune told for a penny.

I heard the click when the penny dropped. The dial behind the glass went up to 297 pounds. Big fat Mosko turned and grinned at all of us. "You see?" he said.

Then it happened. Maybe he was clumsy, maybe there was oil on the platform, maybe there was a ghost and it pushed him. I don't know. All I know is that Mosko slipped, leaned forward to catch himself, and rammed his head against the glass top.

He gurgled once and went down, with a two-foot razor of glass ripping across his throat. As he fell he tried to smile, and one pudgy hand fumbled at the side of the scales, grabbing out the printed slip that told Big Pete Mosko's fortune.

We had to pry that slip out of his hands —pry it out and read the dead man's future.

Maybe it was just an ordinary scale now, but it told Mosko's fortune, for sure. You figure it out. All I know is what I read, all I know is what Tarelli's scale told Mosko about what was going to happen, and what did happen.

The big white scale stood grinning down on the dead man, and for a minute the cracked and splintered glass sort of fell into a pattern and I had the craziest feeling that I could see Tarelli's face. He was grinning, the scale was grinning, but we didn't grin.

We just pried the little printed slip out of Big Pete Mosko's hand and read his future written there. It was just a single sentence, but it said all there was to be said. . . .

"YOU ARE GOING ON A LONG JOURNEY."





If it wasn't a djinn, it certainly was a reasonable facsimile thereof.

Djinn and Bitters

By Harold Lawlor

I

BY SOME process of feminine logic that I cannot figure out to this day, Connie has decided that the whole weird episode in which we were involved at Alamosa Beach is entirely the fault of Bill Hastings.

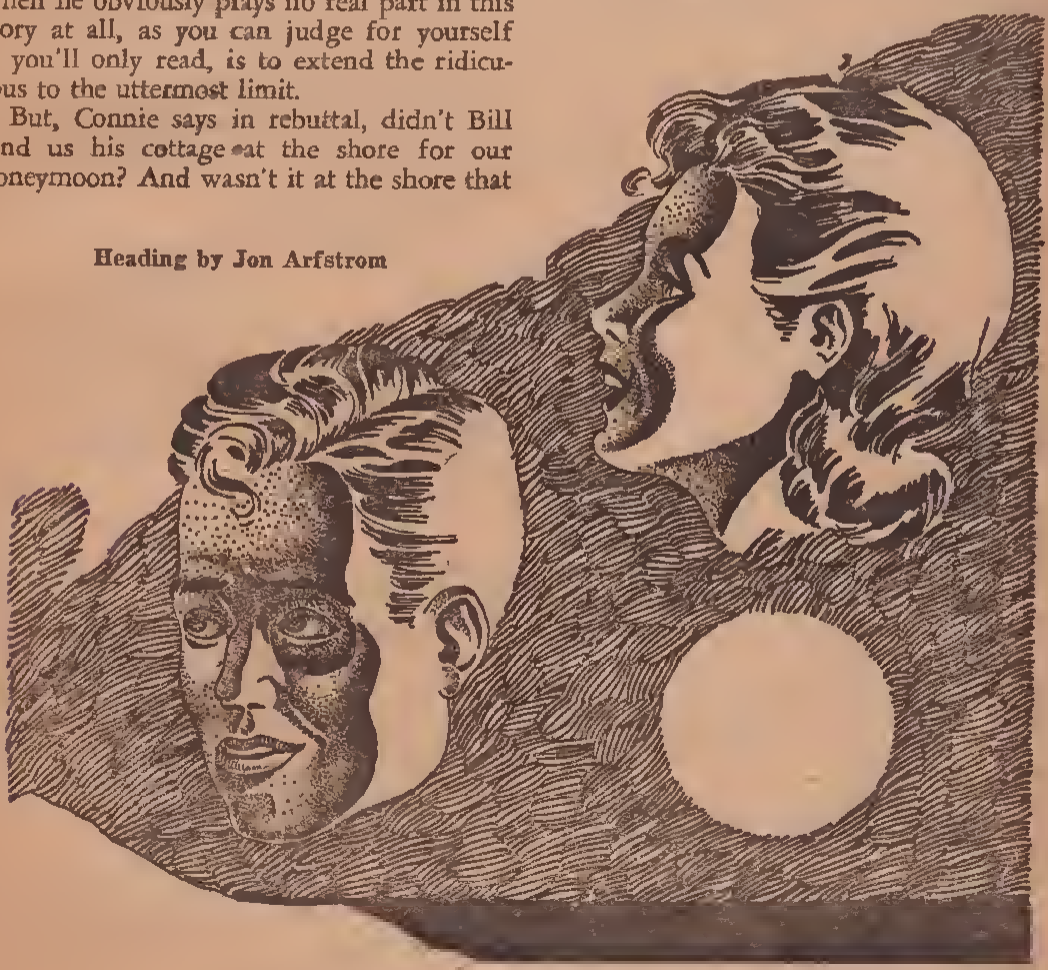
Now Bill is a nice guy, one of the best, and to insist as Connie does that everything that went wrong can be laid at his door, when he obviously plays no real part in this story at all, as you can judge for yourself if you'll only read, is to extend the ridiculous to the uttermost limit.

But, Connie says in rebuttal, didn't Bill lend us his cottage at the shore for our honeymoon? And wasn't it at the shore that we found the bottle of amethyst glass? And wasn't it after we found the amethyst glass bottle with its surprising contents that all our troubles began?

"Well, then!" Connie has a way of saying, ending the argument.

Surely you can see that such logic is irrefutable? Particularly if you're a married man yourself?

I'm afraid Connie will never forgive Bill for blacking my eye at the ushers' dinner



Heading by Jon Arfstrom

the night before the wedding, though personally I never held it against him for it was purely and simply an accident, and we were all shellacked at the time. Besides, he no more meant to black my eye, I'm sure, than I intended to tear his ear, which after all, did no great harm except that it didn't improve his looks any, and he was going to be the best man. But then, come to think of it, his looks weren't anything to write home about to begin with.

I tried to point this out to Connie afterward.

"Keep still, Pete Bartlett!" she said. "I was never so mortified in all my life as I was this morning when I came moseying up the aisle and saw you standing in the chancel. What a sight for the eyes of a blushing bride! Tsk, tsk!" At the memory, her brows swooped toward the bridge of her nose. "That drunken bum, Bill Hastings!"

"But, honey. I hit him first."

"That's it! Stick up for him!"

Ah, well. What was the use?

"Let's not fight on the first day of our honeymoon, baby," I said tenderly.

WE'D been married at ten o'clock that morning, left the reception at two, and now two hours later we were both lying on the warm sands of deserted Alamosa Beach, basking in the late afternoon sun. It had been a popular vacation spot in its day, but that day was long since past. Except for Bill's cottage where we were staying, the few other shacks high on the dunes behind us were deserted. There were still a few guests, we had been told, in the rickety old hotel at the far end of the beach. But that was around a bend in the shore, and the hotel and its guests were out of our sight and we were out of theirs.

This made it convenient whenever I felt like kissing Connie, which I'm bound to say was often. For she detests love-making in public.

But now, in the intervals between kisses, we were lying flat on our backs, with Connie at right angles to me, her bright-penny head resting none too comfortably on my stomach. We were talking of this and that, and she was letting the sands drift idly through her hands. First she'd plunge them in, palms down, and then she'd turn them, bringing up palmsful of the golden grains only to let them spill in drifts through her slightly spread fingers.

And that was how she found the bottle.

Her fingers encountered something hard, and she burrowed deeper into the sand, dredging up at last a bottle. It was of amethyst glass with little air-bubbles embedded in the crystal. But though the air-bubbles showed up plainly when you held the bottle up against the light, it wasn't possible to see into it. It bore no label, and it was very tightly corked.

"Dear me," Connie said thoughtfully, holding the thing aloft. "The Morton luck."

"You're a Bartlett now," I reminded her fondly.

"Why, so I am. But my luck still holds."

"You mean it's got Scotch in it?"

"Try to climb onto a spiritual plane, dear, for once in your life," Connie said. "Scotch, indeed! No. But there'll be a djinn in it, of course, who'll have to grant me whatever I wish for. Wait and see. I've always been lucky, haven't I? Remember the time I found the purse with seventy-nine cents in it on the park bench? And the night I found the woman's slipper in the Bijou Theater? And—"

"—this morning, when you got me up to the altar?"

"Which I'll live to regret, no doubt," Connie smiled. "Well, anyway. A djinn. Think of it, dear."

I didn't think much of it.

"Suppose you pull the cork out?" I yawned. "And then we can both relax again."

"I've married a man with no imagination whatever," complained Connie to the sad sea waves.

But she proceeded to withdraw the cork as I'd told her, and so help me, there really was something in the bottle. I felt a peculiar sensation that wasn't entirely pleasant in the small of my back and all along the channel of my spine as I watched a thin trickle of gray vapor emerge from the bottle, and slowly begin to rise above it.

The thick mist rose higher still till it was

hovering above us, grew denser, and began to form into a shape resembling something remotely human—something like that of the rubber man in the old Michelin tire advertisements.

It was no thing of great beauty, but if it wasn't a djinn, I thought dazedly, it was certainly a reasonable facsimile thereof. I stared at the thing, open-mouthed. I was speechless, I'll admit.

But Connie wasn't. Connie never is.

"See, Pete?" she said. "Your sneer, and your cheap cynicism!"

NOW I want to stop here a moment to indulge myself in a seemingly pointless digression, though I assure you that it really isn't. I have a confession to make, and it is this: I'd had serious qualms about marrying Connie.

Much as I loved her, the Bartlett bead is never so completely overruled by its heart that I couldn't see Connie was flippant and frivolous and flutter-brained, with the emotions, undoubtedly shallow, of a child. Yon are please not to believe that I'm trying to set myself up here as her superior. I've had my bird-brained moments, too, and plenty of them. You have only to consider my behavior on the eve of our marriage, as an illustration of that.

But with marriage, I'd always known that I wanted to settle down, to mature, to grow serious—and wiser, too, if possible.

Many's the time after I had proposed to Connie that I'd wake up in the small gray hours of the morning, beset by serious doubts. I knew I'd never be bappy for long with Connie if she didn't change. In the beginning I'd be willing to take it slowly, to match her flippancies, to he as light-hearted and light-minded as she. But would she mature? Could I change her?

Certainly it would have been a slow process. Certainly I owe a debt to the djinn.

For it was a djinn, all right, that the bottle had contained.

He yawned and stretched now, and almost immediately winced.

"Ouch!" be said, in a voice like the mutter of distant thunder. "Am I cramped! Oof, my lumbago! Just keep your shirt on there with your wish for a moment, will you, until I pull myself together?" he asked crankily, bis eyes squinted shut, seemingly with pain.

Connie sat up, hugging her satiny knees. I sat up, too, bracing myself with backward-thrust arms. I would bave fallen down, otherwise, for I assure you it's startling to learn that you have unwittingly released a djinn. I should have doubted the evidence of my senses, but the sun blazed brightly so that I was forced to squint against it, and there came the sharp salt fishy smell of the sea to sting my nostrils, and the sand was hot beneath my legs.

Yes, I told myself, I was conscious, all right, difficult though I found it to believe —with a djinn hanging heavy over our heads like a forfeit in a game tbat children play.

II

THE silence that followed could only be described as pregnant, unbroken save for the soft wash of the sea against the shore. You may judge for yourself of the effect that the djinn had upon ns when I tell you that even Connie was silent, for a change.

"What a life!" the djinn said gloomily, after a moment. He seemed to ruminate, lost in depression.

Deep within me I found my voice. I dragged it out witb an effort. I sought to cheer him. "You think you've got it tough? You should try living in the post-war world."

This seemed to nettle him. He reared back as it stung, regarded me with some dudgeon. "*I* have a nice life, you're telling me? Hah! Bottled up like a pickled onion till I ask myself, am I working for Heinz?" He held up a smoky hand to forestall interruption. "And that isn't all," he went on, warming to the task as he recited the litany of his grievances. "Now I'll bave to work my silly head off to grant the wish, which is sure to be foolish and unreasonable, of whomever it was that released me."

"Poor you!" Connie said softly. "*I* released you."

The djinn seemed to see her for the first

time, and it must be recorded that even in his depression his eyes visibly brightened. I'm afraid any masculine eyes would brighten at the vision of Connie tastefully garbed in a brief blue-and-white polka-dotted Bikini bathing suit. Indeed, I've had trouble with this angle before.

"Well, well, well!" said the djinn, shaking his head in seeming despond, though it was plain to be seen that he was not really distressed. "What'll they be taking off next?"

This was a rhetorcial question, purely, I gathered. But as it seemed to be addressed more or less in my direction, I thought it would do no great harm to straighten him out immediately on a few salient facts.

"This little lady happens to be my wife, repeat wife," I said.

"Oh!" For a minute the disappointment seemed almost more than the djinn could bear. But he must have been a philosopher of sorts for after a minute he said, though somewhat obscurely, "Ah well. That's life for you."

I settled back into my former state of uneasy calm, my suspicions not entirely allayed. This was one hombre, I warned myself, who would probably bear watching.

CONNIE noted my scowl, and proceeded to pour oil on troubled waters.

"The djinn was only being complimentary," she said. "No need for you to be jealous *all* the time, Petey-weetie-sweetie."

"If there's one thing I can't abide," I said fretfully, my nerves quivering like the fringe on a bubble-dancer's G-string, "it's being called Petey-weetie-sweetie in front of strangers."

"Oh, come, now!" the djinn protested, looking somewhat hurt. "Don't look upon me as a stranger, I implore you! Until I grant your wife's wish, which automatically releases me, I'm practically one of the family."

"Not this family," I said sullenly.

Connie said, not displeased with all this, "Now, boys Let's leave this silly argument lie for a moment, while we consider the main question."

"What main question?" I asked.

"The wish, stupid, the wish!"

"Business, always business," the djinn said, gloomy once more. "Well let's get on with it then. The soooer I grant your wish, the faster I can take a powder. What can I do for you? Seeing it's you, it'll be a pleasure almost, despite my griping."

And he looked almost amiable, even indulgent.

Connie thanked him, but she was not to be hurried. She likes to talk over all sides of a question before acting, Connie does. In fact, she likes to talk, period. She sat there in the sand now, her hands absently caressing the satiny skin of her knees, the while a dreamy look came into her large turquoise eyes. And I knew that when she did speak at last, whatever it was she would say would be the end-product of no little musing and considered thought. And Connie has a talent for the bizarre.

The djinn felt this, too, I am sure. I confess to a feeling of no little apprehension as we both waited on the well known tenterhooks.

"You know," Connie began at last conversationally, "I've often read stories about people who'd released djinns from bottles, and it really does seem to me that they're incredibly stupid. The releasers, I mean, not the stories or the djinns or the bottles. For consider! What do the releasers do? Do they consider even the minimum of intelligence in selecting their wish for tbe djinn to grant? They do not!" She answered herself, before we could open our mouths. "They wish for some silly thing like a million dollars, or something like that."

"A million dollars is silly?" I croaked. "Well, now, here's news!"

Even the djinn looked somewhat taken aback. "I can think of sillier things," he said defensively.

"Well, perhaps a million dollars isn't so *very* silly," Connie hedged.

"You're tootin', baby," I said. "For a minute there I thought you'd gone crazy in a big way."

"But the point I'm trying to make is this," Connie went on, patient with my levity. "These people just wish for something sil—something like that, and they neglect to wish

for what seems to me to be the most obvious wish of all. One that should occur to anybody immediately, with little or no thought. Anybody, that is with even a grain of common-sense."

I didn't get it. I don't think the djinn did, either, though he must have had his misgivings, for:

"Something tells me this wish is going to be a stinker," he said dolorously. "You should forgive the expression."

"Cheer up, man, for heaven's sake!" I barked. "What have you got to be bleating about? Have a thought for me! Allah only knows what Connie will wish for, and I've just elected to spend the rest of my life with her."

"She makes you nervous, eh?" the djinn asked, with a trace of commiseration in his booming voice.

"Highly," I said. "Highly." I wiped the perspiration that had seeped out on my brow. "Now listen, Connie," I warned. "I can feel my arteries hardening by the second. All I ask is, if you love me, have a care what you wish for."

"There's nothing to get into such a turmoil and hurly-burly about," Connie said. "I'm merely going to wish a wish. A quite reasonable, logical wish that would occur to any woman. All the men who've opened djinn bottles, with all their fine masculine blather about logic, poor things, have never wished a wish like this."

THE djinn sucked air through his teeth reflectively. He said to me, "You take a woman, now. You never can tell which way she'll jump next."

"I need to learn about women from you?" I asked bitterly. "My life has been cluttered with 'em, cluttered."

"Oh, it has, eh?" Connie said, sitting up straight.

For a minute I didn't notice the danger signal, but plunged on recklessly, "And haven't I driven behind them on the public highways, which alone would be educational enough?" I asked.

"I've made a mental note of all this, never fear," Connie said ominously. "Superior beasts, men. Lords of creation. But if they're so brilliant, why didn't any of them ever wish for a wish like this?"

I looked at the djinn. "Well, I guess we've postponed the evil moment as long as we could. Shall we proceed?"

"Where do you get that 'we' stuff?" the djinn asked coldly. "This is *my* headache, just in case anybody rides up on a white horse to ask you. Well, I've tried to steel myself, so go ahead, Connie. I only hope I can stand it."

"Yes, dear. Tell us," I said.

" 'Us,' " quoted the djinn witheringly.

Connie moistened her red lips with her little pink tongue. I waited, breath in abeyance. The sun shone, the sea smelled, the sand burned, just as I've told you. I was surely conscious.

Connie drew a deep breath. "Well, the wish is merely and simply this. I merely wish you to grant me all the wishes I wish to wish!"

III

THE djinn leaped like a startled gazelle. The howl he emitted was really ear-piercing. Almost could I find it in my heart to feel sorry for the man.

"I merely and simply say nix!" he bawled. "Good Gad! I never heard of such a thing! It's enough to make reason totter on its throne! It's unethical, that's what it is! It's unconstitutional! Why, it's—probably even communistic, even!"

He was waxing incoherent, and who could blame him?

"Oh, nonsense!" Connie said.

"I tell you I won't do it!" the djinn said with considerable asperity.

Connie's eyes narrowed until the irises were only slivers of turquoise beneath her breath-taking lashes. "Just tell me one thing, djinn. Do you or do you not positively have to grant me any wish I wish to wish?"

He couldn't meet her eyes. "I—I guess I do," he said reluctantly. And he murmured something else about an old Arabian law.

"Okay." Connie dusted her palms. "You heard me, bud. I wish you to grant me all the wishes I wish to wish."

"I been taken!" moaned the djinn.

"In any future battle of the sexes," Connie said smugly, "I give you both leave to remember this day."

"And rue it," said the djinn sadly. "Why, I'll be hanging around here forever, like a grape on the vine." And yet, despite his complaints, he must have felt an unwilling admiration for Connie, for he looked at me and said, albeit dolefully, "That's one smart-type tomato you got there, fella. Married to her, I'd hang onto my gold teeth with both hands, if I were you."

I had been considering Connie's wish all this while, and it seemed to me that even for her it made sense. I felt happiness and a deep contentment welling within me.

I smiled complacently. "It seems to me that this is between the djinn and you, Connie. I swear my nervousness is all gone. No need for me to get upset. No skin off my nose, that I can see. You ask me, I'm sitting pretty with a wife who can get me anything I wish for. I have only to relay them to her, and then—"

"You're babbling," Connie said, in an odd tone of voice.

This gave me pause. I looked at her. She was eyeing me in a very strange, reflective sort of way. Even the djinn must have noticed it, for he looked momentarily diverted from his own woes.

"One thing I can't stand," the djinn said, "is a winner who gloats. You're planning to give Pete his come-uppance, Connie?"

I still didn't like that thoughtful look on Connie's face. I cleared my throat nervously. "I did something, maybe?" I asked. "I said something?"

"The time to train a husband," said Connie at a tangent, "is right from the very beginning of the marriage."

The djinn began gleefully snortling and snuffling to himself in a manner that I found altogether revolting.

"You have something in mind, Connie?" asked the djinn.

"Oh, nothing definite. But I do have a hopeful feeling that something about all this business will cause Pete more than a spot or two of mental anguish."

"Constance Bartlett," I said, aghast. I shivered. I must have known even then, intuitively, that she was speaking with the voice of a prophet, and no minor one, at that. "But what did I *do*?"

"Women have cluttered your life, huh? We can't drive, huh?"

She prolonged the "huhs" nastily like a cop in the movies giving someone the third degree. I can't say that I liked it.

Still it wasn't serious. I said, with somewhat more assurance, "Now honey. You know I didn't mean a thing by it. I was just—just being witty."

"Why didn't I laugh?" Connie asked reasonably.

I'm afraid the sound the djinn made at that could only be described as a giggle. A hoarse, muttering, mumbling, rumbling, rasping racket, if you like, but a giggle for all that.

I withered him with a look before turning back to Connie. "This isn't like you, dear. Give me some sign that you forgive me."

But if I were attempting to appeal to her better instincts, she apparently didn't have any.

"You don't even begin to know what I'm like, but oh, brother! are you going to learn!" Connie said. "However, just to show you my heart's in the right place, would you like a drink?"

"I wish I had one right now," I said. And God knows I needed it.

Connie looked at the djinn. "I wish Pete could have his wish."

"Work, work, work," grumbled the djinn. "A body can't have a minute's rest."

I felt something cold and wet in my hand. It was like touching a dog's nose unexpectedly in the dark. I looked down, unnerved.

IT WAS a crystal glass, its sides becomingly dew-beaded, its contents smelling delightfully of something pungently alcoholic. I blinked at it stupidly. There was a moment's pause while manfully I pulled together my reflexes, sadly scattered long since, before I could lift the glass to my lips and take a snort.

My Adam's-apple bobbled in delightful surprise. I rolled my eyes beautifully.

Scotch, by Gad! Good Scotch, too.

"How is it?" asked the djinn professionally, with the air of a man beginning to take a little pride in his work.

"Delectable, delectable!" I muttered absently, my mind spinning like a waltzing mouse. I looked at Connie with awe. "You know, life could be beautiful, dear. I wish—"

"Don't go running a good thing into the ground," Connie warned maliciously.

My heart sank. She had not yet really forgiven me for my ill-chosen remarks about women. She was merely demonstrating her powers tantalizingly in a way to make them stick in my memory. To think that I thought *then* that the situation was grave! Had I but known, as they say in the mystery novels!

For worse was yet to come.

IT BEGAN at once with the flashing speed of an attack from a coiled rattlesnake. I was not forewarned. The thing was upon me before I knew it.

"Well," Connie said, rising, "I suppose I'd better go in and dress. It's getting late."

The djinn rose too, and hovered over her. This brought me up with a jerk.

"Where do you think *you're* going?" I asked him.

"Until I'm released, I have to hover at Connie's beck and call, don't I?" he whined.

"You don't have to hover at her beck and call while she's changing her clothes, oaf!"

"Did I make the rules?" he asked me.

Connie giggled.

"Now, listen!" I said, dropping my glass as I scrambled hastily to my feet. "Now hold on here a minute! Connie! Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Why, no." Connie paused, eyes demurely cast down, appearing to give this some thought. "I believe I'm in my right mind."

"You are like h— you are *not* in your right mind if you think for one minute that I propose to allow you to change your clothes in front of this—this—!"

"I can't spend the rest of my life in a Bikini bathing suit, either, can I?" Connie asked reasonably.

For the first time since I'd met him, the djinn looked completely happy. "You know," he said, "there must be tougher ways than this of earning a living, at that. I take it all back."

The effrontery of the man! The effrontery of both of them, come to think of it!

"By Jupiter!" I cried. "This is insupportable! And on our honeymoon, too! Constance Bartlett, I positively forbid you—"

"Now, wait a minute," the djinn interrupted me smoothly. "There's no real need for all this heat and passion, this deplorable running off at the mouth. Really, I marvel at you, Pete! You, too, Connie! Where is the famous Bartlett logic, the Bartlett quick wit?"

"You mean?"

"I mean there's a very easy, simple, quick way out of this difficulty," the djinn said slyly. "Pshaw! I'm disappointed in both of you! *Think*!"

Connie looked wary, but I said recklessly, "Name it!"

"All Mrs. B. has to do," the djinn said, spreading his hands expressively, "is wish for me to go away from here promptly."

I would have leaped unwittingly at the suggestion, but Connie forestalled me.

"Oh-ho, no you don't!" she cried. "Was I born yesterday? Don't think you can teach your grandmother how to suck eggs, djinn! I should tell you to go away before I've even wished a single profitable wish! Get lost with that idea, chump!"

The djinn lapsed into sullen impotence. I groaned aloud in my frustration. We seemed to have reached an *impasse*.

IV

BUT like many difficult problems, once attacked, the solution itself was so simple that it would have occurred to a Mongolian idiot.

"I'm getting hungry," Connie said plaintively. "We can't hang around here all day. This discussion must end right now. I'm going up to the cottage and change my clothes, and I dare anybody to try to stop me!"

And this time she didn't wait for further argument. She trudged through the sand as swiftly as may be, the djinn hovering

tenaciously and smokily above her, while I perforce brought up the rear of this weird caravan, moaning unhappily to myself, and grimly determined to leave neither of them out of my sight if it killed me.

But the sensibilities of even the most modest would never have been wounded.

In the cottage, Connie merely slit a hole in a blanket, slipped it enshroudingly over her shoulders so that only her head protruded, and demurely proceeded to change her clothes within the shelter of its enveloping folds.

"Shucks!" said the djinn sulkily.

It had been shameful of me to suspect for even a moment that I couldn't trust Connie. Scarcely containing my relief, I went to change my own clothes. When I came out of the bedroom, dressed in slacks and sport shirt, Connie suggested we go down to the hotel dining room for dinner.

It wasn't much of a place, and Duncan Hines would certainly never recommend it, but as the French say, what would you? It was impossible to cook dinner in the cottage for, as Connie pointed out, the djinn was large and the cottage was small, and as a result he seemed to fill the place with smoke and fog.

"What do you think he's going to do to the hotel dining room?" I wondered.

"Don't cross your bridges until they're hatched," Connie said gayly.

"But how are we ever going to explain the djinn?" I wanted to know.

" 'Who excuses, accuses,' " Connie quoted airily. "We simply won't say a word about him. We can recognize him because we let him out of the bottle, but to anyone else he'll just look like a mass of smoke or fog, for you'll have to concede that he isn't very shapely."

"Is that so!" roared the djinn, stung.

"So you see?" Connie said, ignoring his hurt. "We don't have to know any more about it than anyone else, do we?"

This was true enough, so I made no further demur.

Still and all, I'm afraid our entrance into the dining room was as unobtrusive as a platinum blonde at an Abyssinian hoedown.

People started coughing and gasping, and waving their hands in front of their faces, trying futilely to dispel the gray vapor that filled the place and seemed willfully bent upon choking them.

"Did you ever *see* such a fog?" they kept asking each other. They even asked us, thus confirming us in our belief that they suspected nothing.

I daresay we looked, to the naked eye, like a perfectly normal young couple, though closely accompanied by a persistent and overhanging thunder-cloud. However, its proximity to us, while mystifying, seemed to arouse no suspicion among the others.

We settled ourselves at a table, and looked about us, and I must confess that our hearts sank.

Connie regarded with a lacklnstre eye the sagging walls, the splintered floor, the dirty streamers hanging from the ceiling in a ghastly travesty of gaiety. The orchestra, if such it could be called by courtesy, made weirdly unrecognizeable sounds and wheezings that only assailed the ear-drums, and the few conples circling the floor in some grisly gavotte of their own devising could best he described by saying that they were both elderly and unprepossessing.

Through the open French doors, flowers and vines had withered in the boxes allegedly decorating the dilapidated terrace, and the dusk outside seemed alien and unfriendly. Even the sea looked gray and sullen, and now that the sun had gone down, the sky was only a shade lighter than the water.

No setting for romance, this.

"Oh, I wish there was a beautiful moon, at least," Connie said wistfully, sighing. "A honeymoon, Pete, just for us."

It hung in the sky immediately, a great golden ball.

Connie apparently didn't see it at once, for her face was rapt with the picture she was blissfnlly regarding in her mind's eye. She went on, "And I wish these people were all young and handsome and beautifully dressed—"

They were. At once.

"—dancing to the strains of a wonderful orchestra—"

The music was suddenly marvelous.

"—over a floor like satin, in a gorgeous room, hung with brilliantly-lighted crystal chandeliers!"

The glare was blinding. Connie roused from her dream.

"Look!" I said needlessly.

For a minute she seemed nonplussed as she saw her vision of beauty had come true. And then she smiled, and said aloud, "Dear me, I keep forgetting! Thank you, djinn."

"For you, Connie, anything!" the djinn said.

Connie looked hungrily, feasting her beauty-starved eyes, before turning to me. "'Every prospect pleases, and only man is vile,'" she quoted prettily.

"Do you have to look at me when you say that?" I asked peevishly.

Connie dimpled. "It's just that the room is so beautiful now I can't help wishing that you combined the charm of Charles Boyer, the physique of Victor Mature, and the looks of Tyrone Power, just to go with it."

Before either of us knew what was happening, every woman in the place was swarming all over me, running their fingers through my hair, smearing my face with lip-sticky kisses, and so forth and so on. I'm not complaining, mind! It wasn't really disagreeable, just startling. The din was terrific but loud above the cries of the maddened women came Connie's voice almost instantly, clarion-clear: "So help me, I wish I'd kept my big mouth shut before I ever wished a wish as silly as that one!"

I might have known it was too good to last. Before you could say Jack Robinson, I was back in the old body, battered but still serviceable, and no woman in the room was giving me even a second glance.

Connie was fanning herself. She looked quite distraught. "Good heavens, what a sight!" she murmured. "I'll have to watch what I wish for, after this."

The djinn was grinning.

"You might have given me five minutes more, Connie, before calling it off," I said, and to save myself I couldn't keep a querulous note from creeping into my voice.

"I like you better as you are, dear. No one would ever call you The Jersey Lily, perhaps—"

"Thank you," I said, somewhat stiffly.

"—but still, you have your points."

"Thank you again," I said, unbending a little. I leaned forward to kiss her then, but Connie turned her head aside, embarrassed.

"Not now, Pete!" she protested. "You know I don't like love-making in front of others."

"No one's looking," I said.

She pointed upward at the djinn. "Don't forget him."

I looked up. He was chuckling and rumbling to himself, enjoying himself hugely. "You have only to wish that I'll go away," he reminded us silkily.

"I will not!" Connie said.

"Now here's a pretty kettle of fish!" I said, beside myself. "Connie, if you love me—"

"I am *not* getting rid of the djinn!" Connie said flatly. "Why I haven't even begun to wish for anything really good yet. And I won't be rushed. After all, I'm young, with my whole life before me. I want to get used to the idea first. And, in the meantime, I'm having fun, just wishing for inconsequential things."

"But think of what you'll be missing!" I cried unthinkingly.

"Why, you conceited thing, you!" Connie said.

"It really is edifying," broke in the djinn at this point, "to meet a woman like Connie. Not a bit greedy. Not a bit mercenary. None of this wishing for money or jewels or furs or cars or sordid stuff like that."

I regarded him with a jaundiced eye. There were times when the djinn's stuffy smugness would have been well-nigh intolerable. But he wasn't fooling me. I knew he was just rubbing it in, laughing up his sleeve at me. He was being suavely obnoxious, skillfully doing his best to goad me into action. For he knew as well as I did that Connie would never release him of her own accord. If the djinn were to be dismissed, I'd have to do it somehow. I didn't know how, but I'd find a way.

I glanced again at the djinn and I think

he must have been reading my mind, and sought to strengthen my resolve, for under cover of the music he whispered: "Are you man or mouse?" closing one of his eyes in a knowing wink

And why not? After all, we were really allies in a way He was as anxious to take off as I was to see him do it.

Yes, Connie, and Connie alone, was the real stumbling block. I must think of a way to alter her point of view. I must!

And musing thus, I fell into a brown study.

V

UNFORTUNATELY, it was rudely interrupted.

I don't know what brought Gloria Shayne to that particular hotel at that particular time. I don't even want to know. I prefer to remain in ignorance of a grim and unrelenting Fate that holds these things in store for a man to tantalize him to the point of madness.

To indulge in a little ancient history, I knew Gloria when she was a show-girl, and I was press-agenting one of her shows, *Let's Do It!* She is blonde, with a face and a figure that are out of this world. I don't know how she does it, but put a Mother Hubbard on Gloria and she'd still manage to look like Gypsy Rose Lee just before the curtain comes down. Her personality is volatile, and she is extremely vivacious.

I could tell you, too, that she has an I. Q. of .0005, but why should I try to flatter her?

She appeared now from nowhere, and draped herself inextricably around me. "Pete Bartlett, you ole son-of-a-gun! Last time I saw you, BoBo was trying to drag you out from under her grand piano, but you wouldn't let go of Marilyn's ankle!"

"Uh," I said.

"Indeed?" Connie said, all ears.

"Uh, Gloria. This is my *wife,* Connie," I said, hurling myself into the breach. "We were married this morning."

"I give it a year!" cried Gloria, turning on the charm.

"Indeed?" Connie said again.

The look she threw at me was hostile in the extreme.

"You're going to let me steal your husband for just one teentsy dance, aren't you, Mrs. Bartlett?" Gloria asked, without listening for an answer.

"I don't feel like dancing, Gloria," I muttered.

"Oh, go right ahead! Don't consider me!" Connie said. And she added murderously, "*Petey-weetie-sweetie*!"

I never realized before what an unpleasant laugh Gloria had. "Is that what she calls you! Dear God, wait'll the gang hears this!"

I still didn't like the glint in Connie's eyes, but I was too dazed to do anything but suffer Gloria to drag me to my tottering feet and pull me out onto the dance floor. She was talking incessantly, as usual, but it was all just a vague roaring in my ears.

Now I'm not one for making excuses for myself, as a general rule. But after all, I'd had a strenuous day. I honestly think I must have been barely conscious for the next few minutes, and that must have been why I was the last to discover the peculiar thing that happened next.

The first hint I had of anything wrong was that I noticed people were beginning to edge away from us and eye us askance. This intrigued me faintly, for my dancing isn't so bad as all that. And then, too, there seemed to be some weird metamorphosis going on under my hands.

Lightly though I'd been holding Gloria, I couldn't be uncognizant of the fact, in the beginning, that her bare back was soft and smooth to the touch. But now the fingers of my right hand were encountering strange bony protuberances. And my left hand seemed to be holding within it an eagle's talon.

I was really puzzled. But before I could draw back to look down at Gloria, she must have caught a glimpse of herself in one of the gilded mirrors adorning the walls of the room. For she started screaming like a squad-car siren.

I did look down at her then, and had all I could do to keep from ululating wildly myself.

That wasn't Gloria Shayne I was holding! It was a withered crone, a snaggle-toothed hag! And those bony projections I'd been feeling under my hand were the vertebrae of her bent spine.

I knew the reason for this at once, of course. I directed a glare at Connie, still sitting demurely at our table with that unseemly fog hanging low over her head.

Gloria had fainted after that one piercing scream, so I picked her up in my arms, and made my way across the dance floor to Connie.

"You know what that was?" I asked.

"What?"

"The last straw," I said. "Don't you think you've done enough damage already?"

One thing about Connie, she isn't vindictive once she has made her point. She could very well have left Gloria just as she was, as a lesser, more spiteful, woman would have done. But instead she said, "I wish Gloria to be returned to her natural state at once!"

And, of course, the djinn obliged. Gloria opened her eyes almost immediately, and seemed considerably bemused to find herself attractive once more.

"Good heavens!" she said. "I must have been dreaming. Though how I could have possibly been dreaming while I was dancing—"

"Pete has that effect on all women," Connie murmured.

Now Gloria may be a fool, but she isn't a *damned* fool, as my Grandpa used to say. "You ask me," she said now, "there's something mighty fishy going on around here." She stood up to go.

"In the future, my dear," Connie said, bidding her good-bye, "it might be very much wiser to leave other women's husbands alone."

Gloria paled. "You did have a hand in—in whatever it was that happened to me!" She looked at me then, her brown eyes soft with pity. "I don't know what it is you've married, Pete, but you sure picked a dilly!"

"It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy," Connie agreed smoothly.

VI

WELL, I'd had all that any mortal man could be reasonably expected to stand.

"We'll go back to the cottage, Connie, right now," I said grimly. "There's a thing or two I want to talk about with you."

She could have the djinn, or she could have me. I meant to show her she couldn't have both.

Connie's eyes widened at this new note of determination in my voice. Troubled, she looked up at the djinn. He was watching me expectantly, almost encouragingly, I thought.

Connie said, "Very well."

We picked our way carefully back in the dark along the splintered, sand-strewn boards of the deserted beach walk. To our left the sea washed quietly against the shore, and the great golden moon that Connie had wished for still hung low in the sky.

It was a beautiful world, I thought sadly, but a troubled one. And here Connie and I had been frivoling the hours away with nonsense. I was ashamed. Perhaps Connie felt something of this, too, for she was very quiet.

As for the djinn, he just trailed smokily behind us, like the wake from a funnel.

Back in the cottage once more, I asked Connie to sit in a chair. From its depth she regarded me silently while I paced the strip of carpet before her, marshalling my arguments. The djinn hovered above her, quiet too.

"Connie," I said at last, "I'm going to be very, very serious. In the months since we've known each other, I've never shown this side of myself to you before. Almost it will seem to you as if I'm stepping out of character."

She waited.

"Today," I went on, "you had something happen to you that could happen not just once in a lifetime, but once in a millennium. You were given the power to have every wish of yours gratified immediately. So far, you've just amused yourself indiscreetly, but no doubt you believe that you can ask of the

djinn a number of things which he will immediately see that you get?"

"Of course," Connie said.

"Of course," said the djinn. "It has always been my policy to give the customer just a little bit more than the next man." He was jesting again, but his heart wasn't in it. He too had fallen under the spell of this strangely sobered mood that was upon us.

Before I could go on, Connie said, "Peter, I want to say something. It has always been obvious to me that you considered me a mental and emotional lightweight. No, don't bother to deny it," she said, when I would have protested. "I've always known it—here." And she touched her heart. "But, Peter, perhaps I'm *really* not so shallow as you feared. These wishes now, need not always be for my personal gratification, as you seem to fear. I could ask for the larger things, the things of the spirit. I could ask for peace, Peter, an end of war."

She looked up at me pleadingly, begging to be understood. How I wanted to take her, then and there, into my arms! But I waited, holding myself back. Again I tried to muster my arguments.

"An end of war?" I echoed slowly. "But, Connie, after every war hasn't the world been just a little bit better? Oh, not right away, but eventually? Man has always built from destruction. He seems to learn no other way. Even the atomic age was ushered in on a wave of destruction."

CONNIE looked shocked. "But, Pete, surely you're not *advocating* war as a desirable thing!"

"No, of course not! But man seems to be a funny animal, Connie. He never appreciates something handed him on a silver platter. I could be wrong, but I think wishing peace for him would only be like repairing a leak in a broken hose. He'll only break out some place else. Peace is something he will have to earn for himself, or it will never mean anything to him."

"Whether that's true or not," Connie said, "let's put that question aside for the moment. There are other things. Surely I could ask for an end of needless suffering? A cure for incurable diseases?"

"But, Connie," I objected, "you believe in some Greater Power, don't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then perhaps you'll concede that— It has an overall plan; that It, at least, knows there's a meaning to every terrible thing in life—a meaning that our small minds can't fathom?"

"Y—yes."

"Then who among us can say that any suffering is needless?"

Oh, call my arguments specious! Call this sophistry, if you will! I was on shaky ground, and no one knew it better than I. But I was desperate, I tell you, desperate!

Before we could resume, the djinn cleared his throat apologetically.

He said, "These wishes of the spirit are beside the point anyway, I think. I shouldn't care to arrogate to myself powers that belong more properly to what Pete calls a Greater Power. After all, I am not—" He broke off, bowing his head reverently.

"You mean," Connie said, "there are some wishes that even you could not grant?"

The djinn shrugged. "I do not know. I should not care, in any case, to put it to the test." And he said, with a cynicism that was tragic in its connotations, "Why can't you be like *other* humans? Contented with wishes for material things?"

For a minute, I think Connie was too shocked to answer. And then her little chin lifted stubbornly.

"Very well, then. Let's say for the moment that the djinn is right." She looked defiantly at me. "I can still wish for the material things."

But I was ready for that. "To what purpose?" I asked.

"But, Pete! You said yourself, only this afternoon, that a million dollars wasn't silly!"

"I spoke without thought." I went on to mention the names of three of the wealthiest people in the world. "You've seen their pictures in the papers recently, Connie. With all their money, did they look like happy people to you?"

"They had the unhappiest faces I've ever

seen!" Connie cried. "I told you at the time I couldn't understand it."

I nodded. "The silver platter again."

"But then—" Connie began doubtfully. "Oh, Pete! You make it sound as though there were absolutely *nothing* in life to wish for!"

"Well, is there anything to wish for that we don't have already? Or that we can't earn for ourselves if we want it so badly?" I paused a minute, holding my breath. This was the moment. But I was on dangerous ground again, and I knew it. Everything depended on the answer Connie would make to my next question. "Connie, answer me this honestly. What were the happiest moments you've ever spent in your life?"

I waited, breath held. The djinn watched anxiously, too, sensing the crisis.

Connie didn't even have to stop to think, bless her! She smiled and said softly, "How can you ask, Pete? This afternoon, of course. On the beach. Just before I found the bottle."

I waited again, gladness now in my heart. It was the answer I'd hoped for, the answer I would have given myself had the same question been asked of me.

"Just *before* I found the bottle!" Connie repeated softly, her eyes widening. "And we've been squabbling ever since!" She rose then, and threw herself into my arms. "Oh, Peter! Forgive me! We haven't been really happy since! I wish it *were* this afternoon again before I'd found the bottle!"

The djinn seemed to smile just before he dissolved.

The sun blazed brightly so that I was forced to squint against it, and there came the sharp salt fishy smell of the sea to sting my nostrils, and the sand was hot beneath me.

Connie raised her head from my stomach, and looked about in bewilderment. She dug furiously into the sand for a moment, but there was nothing there. She turned then, and saw me watching her with quizzical eyes.

"Sorry?" I asked.

Perhaps there was fleeting regret in her face, but only for an instant, really. "Oh, Pete! You know I'm not!"

She nuzzled her face against mine. There was no one on the beach. No hovering, eavesdropping djinn. I kissed her lingeringly. It was wonderful. But after she caught her breath, she stared out at the sea for a long moment. And then she looked back at me.

"Just the same," she said grimly, "I will never, never, never forgive Bill Hastings for it all!"

Now I ask you!

Aren't women the darnedest?



"....warning, warning, warning," came the ghostly echo.

The Round Tower

BY

STANTON A. COBLENTZ



Heading by Vincent Napoli

I

OF ALL the shocking and macabre experiences of my life, the one that I shall longest remember occurred a few years ago in Paris.

Like hundreds of other young Americans, I was then an art student in the French metropolis. Having been there several years, I had acquired a fair speaking knowledge of the language, as well as an acquaintance with many odd nooks and corners of the city, which I used to visit for my own amusement. I did not foresee that one of my strolls of discovery through the winding ancient streets was to involve me in a dread adventure.

One rather hot and sultry August evening, just as twilight was softening the hard stone outlines of the buildings, I was making a random pilgrimage through an old part of the city. I did not know just where I was; but suddenly I found myself in a district I did not remember ever having seen before. Emerging from the defile of a crazy twisted alley, I found myself in a large stone court opposite a grim but imposing edifice.

Four or five stories high, it looked like the typical medieval fortress. Each of its

four corners was featured by a round tower which, with its mere slits of windows and its pointed spear-sharp peak, might have come straight from the Middle Ages. The central structure also rose to a sharp spire, surmounting all the others; its meagre windows, not quite so narrow as those of the towers, were crossed by iron bars on the two lower floors. But what most surprised me were the three successive rows of stone ramparts, each higher than the one before it, which separated me from the castle; and the musket-bearing sentries that stood in front.

"Strange," I thought, "I've never run across this place before, nor even heard it mentioned."

But curiosity is one of my dominant traits; I wouldn't have been true to my own nature if I had not started toward the castle. I will admit that I did have a creepy sensation as I approached; something within me seemed to pull me back, as if a voice were crying, "Keep away! Keep away!" But a counter-voice—probably some devil inside me—was urging me forward.

I fully expected to be stopped by the guards; but they stood sleepily at their posts, and appeared not even to notice me. So stiff and motionless they seemed that a fleeting doubt came over me as to whether they were live men or dummies. Besides, there was something peculiar about their uniforms; in the gathering twilight, it was hard to observe details, but their clothes seemed rather like museum pieces—almost what you would have expected of guards a hundred years ago.

Not being challenged, I kept on. I knew that it was reckless of me; but I passed through a first gate, a second, and a third, and not a hand or a voice was lifted to stop me. By the time I was in the castle itself, and saw its gray stone walls enclosing me in a sort of heavy dusk, a chill was stealing along my spine despite the heat. A musty smell, as if from bygone centuries, was in my nostrils; and a cold sweat burst out on my brows and the palms of my hands as I turned to leave.

It was then that I first heard the voice from above. It was a plaintive voice, in a woman's melodious tones. *"Monsieur! Monsieur!"*

"Qu'est que c'est que ça? Qu'est que c'est que ça?" I called back, almost automatically ("What is it? What is it?").

But the chill along my spine deepened. More of that clammy sweat came out on my brow. I am sorry to own it, but I had no wish except to dash out through the three gates, past the stone ramparts, and on to the known, safe streets.

Yet within me some resisting voice cried out, "Jim, you crazy fool! What are you scared of?" And so, though sbuddering, I held my ground.

"Will you come up, *monsieur?*" the voice invited, in the same soft feminine tones, which yet had an urgency that I could not miss. Frankness compels me to admit that there was nothing I desired less than to ascend those winding old stone stairs in the semi-darkness. But here was a challenge to my manliness. If I dashed away like a trembling rabbit, I'd never again be able to look myself in the face. Besides, mightn't someone really be needing my help?

WHILE my mind traveled romantically between hopes of rescuing maiden innocence and fears of being trapped into some monstrous den, I took my way slowly up the spiral stairs. Through foot-deep slits in the rock walls, barely enough light was admitted to enable me to stumble up in a shadowy sort of way. Nevertbeless, something within me still seemed to be pressing my reluctant feet forward, at the same time as a counter-force screamed that I was the world's prize fool, and would race away if I valued my skin.

That climb up the old stairway seemed never-ending, although actually I could not have mounted more than two or three flights. Once or twice, owing to some irregularity in the stone, I stumbled and almost fell. "Here, Mister, here!" the woman's voice kept encouraging. And if it hadn't been for that repeated summons, surely my courage would have given out. Even so, I noted something a little strange about the voice, the tones not quite those of the Parisian French I had learned to speak; the

speaker apparently had a slight foreign accent.

At last, puffing a little, I found myself in a tower room—a small chamber whose round stone walls were slitted with just windows enough to make the outlines of objects mistily visible. The place was without furniture, except for a bare table and several chairs near the further wall; but what drew my attention, what held me galvanized, were the human occupants.

So as to see them more clearly, I flashed on my cigarette lighter—at which they drew back in a wide-mouthed startled sort of way, as if they had never seen such a device before. But in that glimpse of a few seconds, before I let the flame die out, I clearly saw the faces; the fat, stolid-looking man, with double chins and a beefy complexion; the alert, bright-eyed boy of seven or eight, and a girl of fourteen or fifteen; and the two women, the younger of a rather commonplace appearance, but the elder of a striking aspect, almost regal in the proud tilt of the shapely head, the lovely contours of the cheeks and lips, and the imperious flash of eyes that seemed made to command.

"Oh, *monsieur,*" she exclaimed. "Thank you, sir, thank you very much."

All at once it struck me that there was something unutterably sad about the tones; something unspeakably sad, too, in the looks of the two women and the man, something bleak that seemed tn pervade the atmosphere like a dissolved essence, until I caught its contagion and felt as if a whole world's sorrow were pressing down upon my head.

Now, as never before, I wanted to flee. But something held me rooted to the spot. I was like a man in a dread dream, who knows he is dreaming and yet cannot awaken; repelled and at the same time fascinated, I watched the elder woman approach with outflung arms.

II

THERE was, let me not deny it, a seductive charm about her glowing femininity. Although she was no lnnger young—I took her to be somewhere in the nether years just beyond thirty-five—there was something extraordinarily appealing and sweet in the smile which she flashed upon me, a plaintive smile as of one who looks at you from depths of unbearable suffering. At the same time, there was something that drew me to her; held me spellbound with a magnetic compulsion. I could have imagined men easily and willingly enslaved to that woman.

"*Monsieur,*" she pleaded—and for the sake of convenience I give the English equivalent of her words—"*monsieur*, they have ringed us around. What are we to dn? In the name of the good Lord, what are we to do?"

"Tbey permit us not even a newspaper, *monsieur,*" rumbled the heavy vnice of the man, as bis portly form slouched forward.

"They stand over us all the time. We have no privacy except in our beds," put in tbe younger woman, with a despairing gesture of one bony hand.

"They inspect all our food—every bit of bread and meat, suspecting it may contain secret papers," the elder woman lamented. "Worse still—our doors are all locked from outside. We can hardly move a step without being trailed by a guard. We cannot read, we can hardly think without being inspected. Oh, was ever any one tormented with such vile persecution?"

"Was anyone ever tormented with such vile persecution?" the second lady took up the cry, in a thin wailing voice that sent the shudders again coursing down my spine.

As if by instinct, I was backing toward the door. I wondered if I were not the victim of some frightful hallucination.

"But what do you want me to dn?" I blurted out, as with one hand I groped behind me for the doorknob.

"Do? What do we want you to do, *monsieur?*" groaned the elder wnman. "Speak with *them!* Plead with *them!* Beg them to treat us like human beings—not like beasts in cages!"

"But *who* am I to speak to? Who are they? What do you mean, Madam?"

"Who but our persecutors—our oppressors?"

"Who but our persecutors—our oppres-

sors?" echoed the other woman, with a ghostly repetition of the words.

By this time it was so dark that the five persons made but shadows indistinctly seen against the dungeon-like gloom. There was no arguing now with my fear; it was taking command of me; the next instant, bad the man not surmised my thoughts by some clairvoyant perception, I would have left the dolorous strangers to their fate and dashed pellmell down the tower stairs.

"Hold, *monsieur,*" his voice detained me. "It is growing late—we need a light."

And then, with startled eyes, I witnessed one of the eeriest, one of the most inexplicable incidents of all. Suddenly, though I had seen no lantern, there was a light in the room! It was a sort of gray-white phosphorescence, midway between the hue of a light fog and that of pewter; and it seemed to come from nowhere in particular, but filled the room with a fluctuating radiance, at times bright enough to reveal every object, at times permitting everything to sink back almost into invisibility. By this illumination all things—even the man's beefy face—took on a ghastly pallor; my own hand, outstretched in a gesture of spontaneous horror, startled me with its pale, spectral quality.

"Do not be afraid, *monsieur,*" one of the women spoke reassuringly. "*They* will not find you. The guards were sleeping; else you could not have come up. You were heaven-sent to help us in our need."

My knees quivering beneath me, I did not feel heaven-sent to help anyone. In that uncanny wavering light, which struck my disordered imagination as almost sepulchral, I was more frightened than in the darkness. I was just a little relieved, however, to see how the small boy, curled up near the wall with some straw for a pillow, was sleeping an apparently normal childhood sleep.

Nevertheless, I had found the doorknob, and was drawing it toward me. A blast of chilly air, contrasting weirdly with the heat of the summer evening, swept up the tower stairs.

A second more, and I would have been gone. But the elder woman, crossing the room like a flash of light, had placed herself next to me; between me and the door. I could see her big sad eyes, not a foot from mine, glowing as if from immense hollow depths; I could see her long, pale proud face alternately brightening and darkening by the flickers of the changeable unearthly light. And once more she exercised that strange, that magical compulsion upon me. My limbs were frozen. I could merely stare—and wonder.

"It is not for our own sakes, *monsieur,*" she resumed, in a voice that shook and wavered even more than did the light. "It is not for our own sakes that I beg your aid, but for our poor, innocent children. For their sakes, in the name of heaven's mercy, go out and plead with our oppressors, *monsieur.* Rush forth—rush forth and summon help, before it is too late!"

"Before it is too late!" came a low sobbing echo.

"But you—who are you?" I demanded, growing more mystified from minute to minute.

"We? Who are we? Is there anyone in all Paris that does not know?"

"Is there anyone in all Paris that does not know?" there sounded a sobbing refrain.

But they seemed not to hear, or at least not to believe my denials.

"Look at me! Do you not recognize me?" the man demanded, thrusting his face within inches of mine. "Who in all the land could help recognizing me?"

Observing the round, commonplace features, the paunchy cheeks, the sensual lips and dull eyes, I failed to recognize anyone I had ever known.

"Ah, *monsieur,* you must be a stranger in the land."

"I—I—yes, I am a stranger—from California," I managed to grasp at a straw.

"From where do you say, *monsieur?*" he asked, as if he had never heard of my native state. And then dismally he went on, half to himself, "Am I then so changed by my bardships that I cannot be recognized? Ah, no doubt I had a different look in the old times, when I went forth daily in the hunt. Yes, that was a sport worthy of a king—chasing the antlered stag. A sport worthy of a king!"

"And I," bewailed the elder woman, her eyes downcast, her whole form seeming indistinctly to sag, "perhaps I also am changed—oh, how changed from the days when I led in gay revels and frolics, and banquets and masked balls, and was merry the whole day long—and the whole night long, too! Little did I suspect, in those old happy times, what a bitter blow was in store for me!"

"Little did I suspect," moaned the second woman. "Little did we all suspect!"

Had I chanced upon a band of lunatics? Was this old tower the hospital where these poor deranged wretches were kept? This seemed to me, all in all, the most plausible solution. Nevertheless, it did not explain the weird light, which still pervaded the grim round tower room from some unseen source. Nor did it account for various other incidents, which I report even now with a tingling sensation along the spine and a numbing clutch at the heart.

III

IT MAY have been only the wind; but the door, which I had opened slightly, suddenly closed with a dull thudding jar. Yet how could it have been the wind, since the door opened inward, and hence a breeze from below would have pushed the door wider open? And from inside the closed room, how could an air current originate? But I was sure that no hand, and least of all mine, had touched the door.

Even as I struggled to regain my composure, I reached again for the door handle, more determined than ever to leave. But, as I did so, my shaken nerves were shattered by another shock. With a series of high-pitched yipping barks, a small creature ran out as if from nowhere and began cavorting about my knees. Where had the little dog come from? I was certain it had not been in the room before. I was equally convinced that there was no way for it to enter.

ONLY A CONNOISSEUR of horrors would have appreciated the window dummy. . . .

"The Weird Tailor"

ROBERT BLOCH

Prisoners in rose quartz!

"Shallajai"

ARTHUR J. BURKS

"The City"

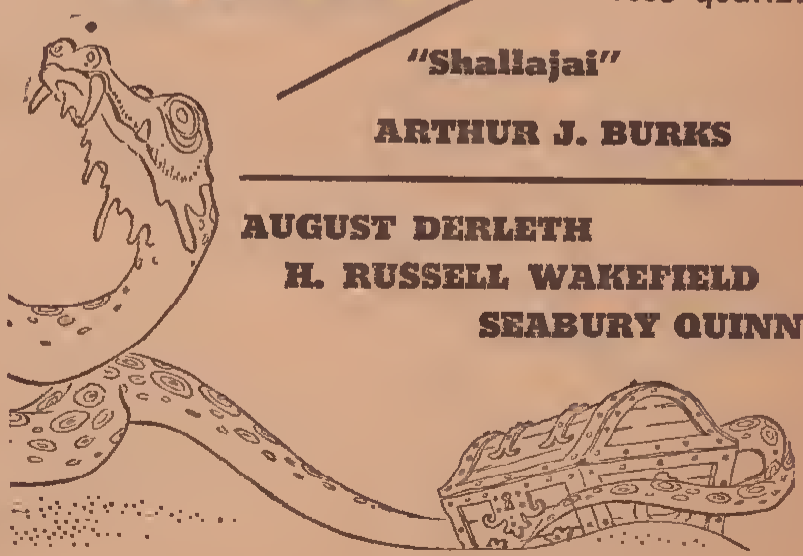
Verses by

H. P. LOVECRAFT

AUGUST DERLETH

H. RUSSELL WAKEFIELD

SEABURY QUINN



Treasure Trove in the next **WEIRD TALES**

By the flickering grayish-white light, it had a sort of half-solid appearance as I reached down to pet it; and somehow I was not quite able to place a hand upon it. Eluding my touch, it ran over to the elder woman, who bent down and caressed it. And then, as suddenly as it had come, it was gone. But from someone's throat—the adolescent girl's, I believe—there burst a spasm of uncanny hollow laughter.

Then, as I pulled at the doorknob, the elder woman was again at my side, her lovely sad eyes fixing me with a stare of such terrible intensity that I was gripped powerless in my place. My hand dropped from the doorknob; for the first time, I knew myself to be a prisoner.

"What is to happen to us, *monsieur?*" she lamented, not hysterically, but with an air of dignified restraint beneath which I could feel the hot passion smoldering. "What is to happen to us all? Time after time we hear the tocsin sounding below us on the streets. We hear the crowds shouting. But we can only guess what it all means. Can you not tell us, *monsieur,* what it means?"

"Can you not tell us, *monsieur?*" echoed the younger woman.

I shook my head, helplessly.

"Ah, *monsieur,* you are like them all," the first speaker sighed. "Like the guards—like that monster who has charge of us. You know, yet you will tell us nothing."

"You know, yet you will tell us nothing," came the unfailing repetition.

"I feel it in my bones, a worse fate is in store for us," the woman moaned, while one pale hand moved significantly across her neck. "My sainted mother, who was far wiser than I, foresaw it all long ago; but then I was too young and giddy to listen. Now that she is in her grave—*monsieur,* sometimes at night I can see her before me, warning, warning, warning——"

"Warning, warning, warning———" took up the other woman.

"Come, come now. Things are not always so bad, are they?" the rumbling voice of the man broke out in incongruous, soothing contrast. "We have no complaints about many things—least of all, about the food, now have we? At noon we have three soups, two entrees, two roasts, fruit, cheese, claret, and champagne—it is not all we have known in our better days, *monsieur,* but it is not bad. It is not bad. Then the boy and I, on fine days, are allowed to walk in the court below—"

"*You* can walk there, but not I!" broke out the elder woman, who was evidently his wife. "You can submit yourself to the staring insolence of those beasts of guards—not I! You can console yourself with your fine meals—not I, not I! I—I think of the fate that is in store for us all. I—I think of the future of our poor children!"

"I—think of the future of our poor children!" came the inevitable echo.

The boy, slumbering against the wall, chose this particular moment to turn over in his sleep and moan.

FOR my part would have left then and there—had this been possible. But even if I had not already been riveted to the spot, I would have been held by the woman's anguished cry.

"Think of our friends—our poor friends—the ones who did not escape, or came back out of loyalty to us—those tigers in human form have cut their heads from their bodies—torn them limb from limb!"

"Have cut their heads from their bodies—torn them limb from limb!"

"Come, come, my dear," interposed the man, still in a placating voice, "we cannot always think of these horrible things. Come, come, play for me at the clavecin, as of old—sing to me, my dear."

As if from nowhere, an old-fashioned musical instrument—a clavecin, or harpsichord—appeared before us. It could not have been there before without being seen, for it was a huge thing on legs, nearly as large as a modern piano. Yet there it was, clearly visible in the wavering grayish light; with a stool before it, at which the elder woman seated herself.

As my lips opened in a half-uttered cry of horror, the player began plucking at the strings—and the strangest melodies I had ever heard began coming forth, while she accompanied them in a quivering sad voice

of a subdued loveliness. The music was low, almost ghostly faint; and was charged with such a deep, throbbing sorrow that, at the first note, the tears began coursing down my cheeks. As the woman went on and on with her song, its melancholy increased, though it still had the same eerily distant quality; it seemed that I was listening to a plaint from across countless years and remotest places. Now everyone in the room appeared to have forgotten my presence; the younger woman, the man and the girl gathered about the player, as if to drink in every note; even the small boy arose and joined the group; and as they did so the light, as if condensed by some unseen reflector, suddenly concentrated upon them, leaving the rest of the room in shadow. And then the illumination, wavering and flickering more than ever, began to dwindle . . . until suddenly, without warning, it went out and I found myself in blackness.

But still, from amid the coaly gloom, that phantom-thin music continued to sound, the voice of the singer blended with the notes of the instrument, unspeakably sad, immensely distant, fading like the wind-borne tones of receding minstrels.

Only then did all my concentrated dread and horror find expression in one tremendous scream. Fumbling and groping, somehow I found the door; somehow I forced my limbs free of the spell that had gripped them, and started down the twisted stairs. And then all at once everything went blank.

WHEN I came to myself, still listening to that sad, faint music, I was lying on a Paris street. The glow of late twilight was in the air; a small crowd had gathered about me.

"Does *monsieur* need help?" a man's voice sympathetically asked. "He stumbled and fell, and has been many minutes coming to. No doubt it was only the heat."

"No doubt—it was the heat," I agreed, as I struggled to my feet. But in my ears that phantom music still made a dismal refrain.

Next day I reported my experience to my friend Jacques Chervier, a student at the Sorbonne, whose specialty was Parisian history.

He looked at me sharply as I finished. "Just where did you say this happened?"

I mentioned the exact street location, of which I had taken note after the adventure.

"So?" he answered, significantly. "So? Well, this *is* strange. Do you know you were walking on the exact site of the old Temple?"

"What in thunder was the Temple?"

"It was the old castle of the Knights Templars, which was torn down in 1811, at the age of almost six hundred years."

"Torn down in 1811?" I repeated, dully.

"It's famous as the scene of many historic episodes," Jacques warmed to his theme, "not the least notable being the imprisonment of a king and queen of France, along with their two children, and Madame Elizabeth, the king's sister. That was back in 1792. You know, of course, what king and queen I refer to."

I could only mumble something incoherent.

"Louis the Sixteenth and Marie Antoinette were both lodged there before being sent to the guillotine. The old castle, from all I can make out, was exactly as you have described it, even to the small dog that kept the prisoners company."

"But that doesn't explain why I, of all persons, and at this particular time—"

"Don't you recall the date?"

"Let's see. Today's the fourteenth, isn't it?"

"And yesterday was the thirteenth. It was on August thirteenth, just at about sunset, that Louis the Sixteenth and Marie Antoinette were imprisoned in the Temple. Perhaps every year, on the anniversary of that event—"

But I did not hear the remainder of Jacques' speech. I was not interested in his explanations. In my ears a thin, sorrowful music seemed to be playing; I was back in a tower room, in a wavering fog-gray light, where five shadowy figures were gathered, among them a woman whose deep pleading tragic eyes seemed to call and call across an immeasurable gulf.

Luna Aeternalis

by CLARK ASHTON SMITH



BY an alien dream despatched and driven
In a land to strange stars given,
Stars that summoned forth the moon,
Singing a strange red eldritch rune,
I heard the coming of the moon
With tremulus rim that clomb and rang,
Whose rondure on the horizon rang
A gong distinct with silvern clang,
Re-echoing distantly, until,
Arisen soon,
In silent silver stood the moon
Above the horizon ringing still.

Half-waned and hollow was her brow,
And caverned by the night; but now
Her twilight turned the stars' loud rune
To muted music in a swoon,
Her low light lulled the stars to drowse,
Flicker and fail, and vaguely rouse:
I felt the silence come and go
As the red stars muttered low . . .



Old with moonlight lay the night,
And on the desert lay
Ancient and unending light
That assured not of the day;
For the half-moon stood to stay
Fixed at the heavens' height
And eternal ere the day.
Triumphant stood the moon
In a false and cold and constant noon:
Surely in conflict fell
The true, lost sun of noon;
The golden might of Uriel
Met some white demon of the moon.

By an alien dream despatched and driven,
I found a land to demons given,
To silvern, silent demons given
That flew and fluttered from out the moon,
Weaving about her tomb-white face
With mop and mow and mad grimace,
And circling down from the semilune
In a dim and Saturnalian dance,
To pirouette and pause and prance,
To withdraw and advance,
All in a wan eternal dance.



He had to speak quickly; the power would not last long.

The Last Man

BY SEABURY QUINN

One cup to the dead already—
Hurrah for the next that dies!
—Bartholomew Dowling, *The Revel.*

MYCROFT paused self-consciously before the little bronze plate marked simply TOUSSAINT above the doorbell of the big brownstone house in East One Hundred and Thirty-sixth Street. He felt extraordinarily foolish, like a costumed adult at a child's masquerade party, or as if he were about to rise and "speak a piece." People—his kind of people—simply didn't do this sort of thing.

Then his resolution hardened. "What can I lose?" he muttered cynically, and pressed the button.

A Negro butler, correct as a St. John's Wood functionary in silver-buttoned dress suit and striped waistcoat, answered his ring. "Mister—Monsieur Toussaint?" asked Mycroft tentatively.

"Who iss calling?" asked the butler with the merest trace of accent on his words.

"Uh—Mr. Smith—no, Jones," Mycroft replied, and the shadow of a sneer showed at the corners of the young Negro's mouth. "One minute, if you pleez," he returned, stepped back into the hall and closed the

Heading by Vincent Napoli

door. In a moment he was back and held the door open. "This way, if you pleez," he invited.

Mycroft was not quite certain what he would find; what he did find amazed him. Vaguely he had thought the place would reek with incense, possibly be hung with meretricious tapestries and papier-mâche weapons, perhaps display a crystal ball or two against cheap cotton-velvet table covers. He was almost awe-struck by the somber magnificence of the room into which he was ushered. Deep-piled rugs from Hamadan and Samarkand lay on the floor, the furniture was obviously French, dull matte-gold wood upholstered in olive-green brocade, on the walls were either Renoir and Picasso originals or imitations good enough to fool a connoisseur; somewhat incongruously, above the fireplace where logs blazed on polished andirons hung a square of rather crudely woven cotton stuff bordered in barbaric black and green. On second look the border proved to be a highly conventionalized but still disturbingly realistic serpent. More in character was the enormous black Persian cat that crouched upon a lustrous Bokhara prayer rug before the fire, paws tucked demurely under it, great plumy tail curled round it, and stared at him with yellow, sulphurous eyes.

"Good evening, Mr. Mycroft, you wished to see me?" Mycroft started as if he had been stung by a wasp. He had not heard the speaker enter, and certainly he was not prepared to be greeted by name.

AT THE entrance of the drawing room stood his host, smiling faintly at his discomfiture. He was a tall man of uncertain age, dressed with a beautiful attention to detail in faultless evening clothes. The studs of his immaculate white shirt were star sapphires, so were his cuff links, in his lapel showed the red ribbon of the Légion d'Honneur, and he was very black. But not comic, not "dressed up," not out of character. He wore his English-tailored dress clothes as one to the manner born, and there was distinction, almost a nobility, about his features that made Mycroft think of the head of an old Roman Emperor, or perhaps a statesman of the Golden Age of the Republic, carved in basalt.

He had planned his introduction, humorous, and a little patronizing, but as he stared at the other Mycroft felt stage fright. "I—" he began, then gulped and stumbled in his speech. "I—uh—I've heard about you, Mister—Monsieur Toussaint. Some friends of mine told me—"

"Yes?" prompted Toussaint as Mycroft's voice frayed out like a pulled woolen thread. "What is it that you want of me?"

"I've heard you're able to do remarkable things—" once more he halted, and a look of irritation crossed his host's calm features.

"Really, Mr. Mycroft—"

"I've heard that you have power to raise spirits!" Mycroft blurted confusedly. "I'm told you can bring spirits of the dead back—" Once again he halted, angry with himself for the fear he felt clawing at his throat. "Can it be done? Can you do it?"

"Of course," Toussaint replied, quite as if he had been asked if he could furnish musicians for a party. "Whose spirit is it that you want called? When—and how—did he die?"

Mycroft felt on surer ground now. There was no nonsense about this Toussaint, no hint of the charlatan. He was a businessman discussing business. "There are several of them—twenty-five or -six. They died in—er—different ways. You see, they served with me in—"

"Very well, Mr. Mycroft. Come here night after tomorrow at precisely ten minutes to twelve. Everything will be in readiness, and you must on no account be late. Leave your telephone and address with the butler, in case I have to get in touch with you."

"And the fee?"

"The fee will be five hundred dollars, payable after the séance, if you're satisfied. Otherwise there will be no charge. Good evening, Mr. Mycroft."

The impulse had come to him that evening as he walked across the Park from

his apartment to his club in East Eighty-sixth Street. Spring had come to New York, delicately as a ballerina dancing *sur les pointes*, every tree was veiled in scarves of green chiffon, every park was jeweled with crocus-gold, but he had found no comfort in awakening nature, nor any joy in the sweet softness of the air. That morning as he unfurled his *Times* in the subway on his way downtown he had seen the notice of Roy Hardy's death. Roy had been the twenty-sixth. He was the last man.

More than fifty years ago they had marched down the Avenue, eager, bright-faced, colors flying, curbside crowds cheering. Off to Cuba, off to fight for Liberty. Remember the Maine!

> "When you hear that bell go ding-a-ling,
> And we all join in and sweetly we will sing, my baby,
> When you hear that bell go ding-a-ling,
> There'll be a hot time in the old town tonight!"

the band had blared. He could still hear the echo of Max Schultz's cornet as he triple-tongued the final note.

They didn't look too much like soldiers, those ribbon-counter clerks and bookkeepers and stock exchange messengers. The supercilious French and British correspondents and observers smiled tolerantly at their efforts to seem military; the Germans laughed outright, and the German-armed, German-trained Spanish veterans disdained them. But after El Caney and San Juan Hill the tune changed. Astounded and demoralized, the Spaniards surrendered in droves, the foreigners became polite, the Cubans took the valiant Americans to their collective hearts, and no one was more gracious in his hospitality than Don José Rosales y Montalvo, whose house in the Calle O'Brien became an informal headquarters for the officers and noncoms of the company.

Don José's table creaked and groaned beneath a load of delicacies such as those young New Yorkers had never seen or even heard of and his cellars seemed inexhaustible. Lads who had known only beer, or, in more reckless moments, gin and whiskey, were introduced to St. Estephe, Johannesburg and Nuites St. Georges. Madeira and Majorca flowed like water, champagne was common as soda pop at home.

But more intoxicating than the strongest, headiest vintage in Don José's caves was Doña Juanita Maria, his daughter. She was a *rubia*, a Spanish blonde, with hair as lustrous as the fine-drawn wires of the gold filigree cross at her throat. Little, almost tiny, she walked with a sort of lilting, questing eagerness, her every movement graceful as a grain-stalk in the wind. Her voice had that sweet, throaty, velvety quality found only in southern countries, and when she played the guitar and sang *cancións* the songs were fraught with yearning sadness and passionate longing that made those hearing her catch their breath.

Every man-jack of them was in love with her, and not a one of them but polished up his Spanish to say, *"Yo te amo, Juanita*—Juanita, I love you!" And there was not a one of them who did not get a sweet, tender refusal and, by way of consolation, a chaste, sisterly kiss on the cheek.

THE night before their transport sailed Don José gave a party, a *celebración grande*. The patio of the house was almost bright as noon with moonlight, and in the narrow Saracenic arches between the pillars of the ambulatory Chinese lanterns hung, glowing golden-yellow in the shadows. A long table clothed with fine Madeira drawnwork and shining silver and crystal was laid in the center of the courtyard, at its center was a great bouquet of red roses. Wreathed in roses a fat wine cask stood on wooden sawhorses near the table's head. "It is Pedro Ximenes, a full hundred years old," Don José explained pridefully. "I have kept it for some great occasion. Surely this is one. What greater honor could it have than to be served to Cuba's gallant liberators on the eve of their departure?"

After dinner toasts were drunk. To *Cuba*

Libré, to Don José, to the lovely Noña Juanita. Then, blushing very prettily, but in nowise disconcerted, she consented to sing them a farewell.

"Pregúntale à las estrellas,
Si no de noche me venllovar,
Pregúntale si no busco,
Para adorarte la soledad . . ."

she sang,

"O ask of the stars above yon
If I did not weep all the night,
O ask if I do not love you,
Who of you dreamt till the
dawn-light . . ."

Sabers flashed in the moonlight, blades beat upon the table. "Juanita! Juanita!" they cried fervently. "We love you, Juanita!"

"And I love you—all of you—*señores amados,*" she called gaily back. "Each one of you I love so much I could not bear to give my heart to him for fear of hurting all the others. So" —her throaty, velvet voice was like a caress—"here is what I promise." Her tone sank to a soft ingratiating pizzacato and her words were delicately spaced, so that they shone like minted silver as she spoke them. "I shall belong to the last one of you. Surely one of you will outlive all the rest, and to him I shall give my heart, myself, all of me. I swear it!" She put both tiny hands against her lips and blew them a collective kiss.

And so, because they all were very young, and very much in love, and also slightly drunk, they formed the Last Man Club, and every year upon the anniversary of that night they met, talked over old times, drank a little more than was good for them, aod dispersed to meet again next year.

THE years slipped by unnoticed as the current of a placid river. And time was good to them. Some of them made names for themselves in finance, the court rooms echoed to the oratory of others; the first World War brought rank and glory to some; more than one nationally advertised product bore the name of one of their number. But time took his fee, also. Each time there were more vacant chairs about the table when they met, and those who remained showed gray at the temples, thickening at the waist, or shining patches of bald scalp. Last year there had been only three of them: Mycroft, Rice and Hardy. Two months ago he and Hardy had acted as pallbearers for Rice, now Hardy was gone.

He hardly knew what made him decide to consult Toussaint. The day before he'd met Dick Prior at luncheon at the India House and somehow talk had turned on mediums and spiritism. "I think they're all a lot of fakes," Mycroft had said, but Prior shook his head in disagreement.

"Some of 'em—most, probably—are, but there are some things hard to explain, Roger. Take this Negro, Toussaint. He *may* be a faker, but—"

"What about him?"

"Well, it seems he's a Haitian; there's a legend he's descended from Christophe, the Black Emperor. I wouldn't know about that, or whether what they say about his having been a *papaloi*—a voodoo priest, you know—has any basis. He's highly educated, graduate of Lima and the Sorbonne and all that—"

"What's he done?" Mycroft demanded testily. "You say he's done remarkable things—"

"He has. Remember Old Man Meson, Noble Meson, and the way his first wife made a monkey out of her successor?"

Mycroft shook his head. "Not very well. I recall there was a will contest—"

"I'll say there was. Old Meson got bit by the love-bug sometime after sixty. Huh, love-bug me eye, it was that little gold digger Suzanne Langdon. The way she took him away from his wife was nothing less than petty larceny. He didn't last long after he divorced Dorothy and married Suzanne. Old men who marry young wives seldom do. When he finally pegged out everybody thought he was iotestate, and that meant Mrs. Meson number two would take the jackpot, but just as she was all set to rake in the chips Dorothy came up with a last

will and testament, signed, sealed, published and declared, and unassailable as Gibraltar. Seems the old goof got wise to himself, and, what was more to the point, to Suzanne, before he kicked the bucket, and made a will that disinherited her, leaving the whole works to Dorothy.

"They found it in the pocket of an old coat in his shooting cabin out on the island, and found the men who'd witnessed it, a Long Island clam-digger and a garage mechanic out at Smithtown."

"How?" asked Mycroft.

"Through this fellow Toussaint. Dorothy had heard of him somehow and went up to Harlem to consult him. She told my Aunt Matilda——Mrs. Truxton Sturdivant, you know—all about it. Seems Toussaint called old Meson's spook up—or maybe down, I wouldn't know—and it told them all about the will, gave 'em minute directions where to look for it, and told 'em who and where the witnesses were. He charged her a stiff fee, but he delivered. She's satisfied."

Mycroft had dismissed the story from his mind that afternoon, but next day when he read Roy Hardy's death notice it recurred to him. That evening as he walked across the Park he reached a decision. Of course, it was all nonsense. But Prior's story hung in his mind like a burr in a dog's fur.

Oh, well . . . he'd have a go at this Toussaint. If nothing more it would be amusing to see him go through his bag of tricks.

THE furniture and rugs had been moved from the drawing room when he reached Toussaint's house ten minutes before twelve two nights later. Before the empty, cold fireplace a kind of altar had been set up, clothed with a faircloth and surmounted by a silver cross, like any chapel sanctuary. But there were other things on it. Before the cross there coiled a great black snake, whether stuffed or carved from black wood he could not determine, and each side of the coiling serpent was a gleaming human skull. Tall candles flickered at each end of the altar, giving off the only light in the room.

As his eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness he saw that a hexangular design had been drawn on the bare floor in red chalk, enclosing the altar and a space some eight feet square each side, and in each of the six angles of the figure stood a little dish filled with black powder. Before the altar, at the very center of the hexagon, was placed a folding chair of the kind used in funeral parlors.

Annoyed, he looked about the room for some sign of Toussaint, and as the big clock in the hall struck the first stave of its hour-chime a footstep sounded at the door. Toussaint entered with an attendant at each elbow. All three wore cassocks of bright scarlet, and over these were surplices of white linen. In addition each wore a red, pointed cap like a miter on his head.

"Be seated," Toussaint whispered, pointing to the folding chair before the altar and speaking quickly, as if great haste were necessary. "On no account, no matter what you see or hear, are you to put so much as a finger past the confines of the hexagon. If you do you are worse than a dead man—you are lost. You understand?"

Mycroft nodded, and Toussaint approached the altar with his attendants close beside him. They did not genuflect, merely bowed deeply, then Toussaint took two candles from beneath his surplice, lit them at the tapers burning on the altar and handed them to his attendants.

Fairly running from one point of the hexagon to another the acolytes set fire to the black powder in the little metal saucers with their candles, then rejoined Toussaint at the altar.

The big hall clock had just completed striking twelve as Toussaint called out sharply:

"Papa Legba, keeper of the gate, open for us!"

Like a congregation making the responses at a litany the acolytes repeated:

"Papa Legba, keeper of the gate, open for us!"

"Papa Legba, open wide the gate that they may pass!" intoned Toussaint, and once again his attendants repeated his invocation.

It might have been the rumble of a subway train, or one of those strange, inexplicable noises that the big city knows at night, but Mycroft could have sworn that he heard the rumble of distant thunder.

Again and again Toussaint repeated his petition that "the gate" be opened, and his attendants echoed it. This was getting to be tiresome. Mycroft shifted on his uncomfortable seat and looked across his shoulder. His heart contracted suddenly and the blood churned in his ears. About the chalk-marked hexagon there seemed to cluster in the smoke cast off by the censers a rank of dim, indistinct forms, forms not quite human, yet resembling nothing else. They did not move, they did not stir as fog stirs in a breath of wind, they simply hung there motionless in the still air.

"Papa Legba, open wide the gate that those this man would speak with may come through!"

shouted Toussaint, and now the silent shadow-forms seemed taking on a kind of substance. Mycroft could distinguish features—Willis Dykes, he'd been the top kick, and Freddie Pyle, the shavetail, Curtis Sackett, Ernie Proust—one after another of his old comrades he saw in the silent circle as a man sees images upon a photographic negative when he holds it up to the light.

Now Toussaint's chant had changed. No longer was it a reiterated plea, but a great shout of victory. "Damballa Oueddo, Master of the Heavens! Damballa, thou art here! Open wide the dead ones' mouths, Damballa Oueddo. Give them breath to speak and answer questions; give this one his heart's desire!"

Turning from the altar be told Mycroft, "Say what you have to say quickly. The power will not last long!"

Mycroft shook himself like a dog emerging from the water. For an instant he saw in his mind's eye the courtyard of Don José's house, saw the eager, flush-faced youths grouped about the table, saw Juanita in the silver glow of moonlight, lovely as a fairy from Tinania's court as she laughed at them, promising . . .

"Juanita, where is Juanita?" he asked thickly. "She promised she would give herself to the last man—"

"Estoy aquí, querido!"

In fifty years and more he had not heard that voice, but he remembered it as if it had been yesterday—or ten minutes since—when he last heard it. "Juanita!" he breathed, and the breath choked in his throat as he pronounced her name.

SHE came toward him quickly, passing through the ranks of misty shades like one who walks through swirling whorls of silvery fog. Both her hands reached toward him in a pretty haste. All in white she was, from the great carved ivory comb in her golden hair to the little white sandals cross-strapped over her silken insteps. Her white mantilla had been drawn across her face coquettishly, but he could see it flutter with the breath of her impatience.

"Rog-ger," she spoke his name with the same hesitation between syllables he remembered so well. "Rog-ger, *querido*—belovèd!"

He leaped from the chair, stretched reaching hands to her outstretched gloved fingers past the boundary of the chalk-drawn hexagon. "Juanita! Juanita, I have waited so long . . . so long . . ."

Her mantilla fell back as his fingers almost touched hers There was something wrong with her face. This was not the image he had carried in his heart for more than fifty years. Beneath the crown of gleaming golden hair, between the folds of the white lace mantilla a bare, fleshless skull looked at him. Empty eye-holes stared into his eyes, lipless teeth grinned at him.

He stumbled like a man hit with a blackjack, spun half-way round, then went down so quickly that the impact of his limpness on the polished floor made the candles on the altar flicker.

"*Maître*," one of the attendants plucked Toussaint's white surplice, "*Maître*, the man is dead."



The Triangle of Terror

By William F. Temple

I HAD written nearly three thousand words that day, and in the after-glow of self-satisfaction I decided that there was certainly something in his life of rural seclusion after all.

In Bloomsbury far too many people were acquainted with me and my address. They were "just dropping in" on me at all hours of the night and day with complete disregard for my work. In their assumption a writer was a person who never worked anyway; his stories were things he just dashed off in odd moments now and again, with no particular thought, as one dashes off letters.

After a string of nights on short rations of sleep, trying to recover some of the time thus stolen from me during the day, I dashed off myself, away from London and these vampires of my attention—my friends. I took care that none of them—none but Spencer, that is—should know my address until I was good and ready for them. And that meant when I had finished my novel.

It was safe to tell Spencer. He never saw any of my other friends. They avoided him because he was—odd. Eccentric. In his musty bed-sitting-room in Mecklenburgh Square he lived in a world of his own. You sensed the strangeness as soon as you stepped into the room, and it was certainly enhanced by his presence.

He was fattish—why, I don't know, for I never saw him eat anything—and, I believe, older than he looked. He looked in his early sixties. Trying to maintain a conversation with him was indeed trying. You felt that quite two-thirds of his attention was somewhere else all the time, and he only intermittently remembered that you were there.

And most of what he said to you he deliberately made cryptic. He had a tortuous mind that loved to puzzle and mystify. Many times I had remonstrated with him: "For God's sake, Spencer, speak straightforwardly and sensibly, will you! I can make more sense out of my income tax correspondence than I can out of you."

When you did make sense out of him, it was invariably worth the trouble. He had more odd knowledge tucked away inside his head than Ripley ever dreamed upon, and he was full of surprising little tit-bits that made me exclaim, "That gives me an idea for a story! . . ."

I made quite a lot of money out of Spencer in this way. Maybe that was why I looked upon him as my best friend.

In fact, the main reason that I elected to keep in touch with him from my lonely cottage among the gorse and pines of Surrey was because my novel dealt with medieval witchcraft and I anticipated difficulty over one or two chapters. I might need to dig in Spencer's fund of knowledge about such things. Also, he had the best library of books on the occult that I had ever come across. It was through a previous search for out-of-the-way information that I originally encountered him.

But about that evening when I was wandering alone across the Surrey heath so comfortably satisfied with the day's work——

IT WAS an evening in midsummer when the atmosphere was close and still, and the going of the sun had seemed to leave it more warm and oppressive than noonday.

The air was a thick, almost liquid substance, from which your lungs were hard pressed to draw oxygen, almost as thick as the blood which pumped at your temples and made your head throb heavily. Headachey weather, and you longed for a storm to come and break it up.

Somewhere this night there was a storm, for along the horizon the sheet lightning flickered and jumped and revealed silently weird-lit glimpses of an unsuspected cloudland that lay out there in the darkness.

Heading by Fred Humiston

I don't know whether it is peculiar to me, but these strange tense evenings of summer always set my imagination working more actively than the chilly autumn and winter nights beloved of the gothically romantic poets.

Keats would begin *"In a drear-nighted December . . .,"* and Poe's Ulalume would be carried to her tomb in *"the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir"* on a *"night in the lonesome October,"* and as for the same gentleman's Raven who quoth "Nevermore!"—*"Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December"* . . .

No, the winter was merely physically uncomfortable. A hot thundery night like this made me mentally uncomfortable. Uneasily, I sensed the imminence of—something. I felt the electric charge slowly but unrelentingly building itself up in the air about me, forming something unknown but black and inimical, growing both in power and in consciousness of its power, awaiting with evil excitement the hour of its unleashing.

Damn it, I thought, I have been thinking too much upon these things. This was the last novel I would write about the occult. The trouble with such an occupation was that the story becomes real to you as you write it, and you are disposed to picture warlocks and werewolves as things you might find in a dark corner of the coal-cellar at some unlucky moment. Especially when you have deliberately retired to solitude to "get into" your book.

The glow of my self-esteem had now died somewhere among these unhealthy thoughts. I had walked too far and become over-tired. The haven of my cottage seemed suddenly desirable, and I forced my heavy feet to quicken their lagging pace.

Here now was the pinewood, like a blot of India ink on the lesser darkness of the night. One hundred yards within it lay the cottage, but despite my impatience they were the slowest hundred yards I traversed that night. Charon himself would have tripped over something in the pitch-blackness of the wood. Nothing of the distant flickering of the lightning penetrated here. I had literally to feel my way along the path.

THEN all of a sudden I stopped in surprise, my hand on the bole of a pine. Somewhere ahead of me glimmered a faint patch of light—green light.

As I watched it, it moved back and forth with a sort of dreadful deliberate slowness. Then it stood still, and as I peered at it I discovered a black cross, as it were, intersecting it. Abruptly the light disappeared, and left me with the realization that the black cross had been the silhouette of the center of the cottage window's frame.

Somebody—or something—was in the cotttage. My heart started going like a two-stroke engine.

Then the human habit of rationalizing unaccountable things came to the fore. It had been a firefly or a jack-o'-lantern of marsh gas from the stagnant pond not far beyond the cottage. Or again—this was the sort of weather that generated those globes of ball lightning which sometimes pop down chimneys and float around inside rooms. Or maybe a tramp was searching either for a bed for the night or for the money for one. But—with a green light?

I waited a while, but there was no return of the phenomenon. I hoped that, whatever it was, it had gone away. Then I fumbled my way through the last few yards to the door and let myself in.

In the darkness within I lit a match and by its feeble light surveyed the room. The words "Is anybody there?" died in my mouth, for it was manifest that there was nobody.

I conveyed the flame to the oil lamp, and the room became bright and cheerful; the shelves of books still in their original colored dust jackets gladdened my eye, as the sight of them always did, and the model galleon, the vase of marigolds, the shining pewter tankards were all familiar and reassuring things.

Nevertheless, I poured myself a scotch and soda before I settled down in the armchair by the fireless hearth to read over and polish the thousands of words I had scribbled that day.

In the midst of my immersion in my own story of the burning of a particularly malignant witch, I suddenly noticed that the scalp muscles at the back of my head were taut and contracted and that my hair must be bristling. And I felt in my mind what my body must have been aware of for some time—that there was some creature behind me and watching me with no friendly regard.

Without seeming to divert my attention from my manuscript, I gazed up from under my brows at the mirror hanging above the fireplace. It showed the wall behind me empty, save for a framed water color of the Devil's Punchbowl at Hindhead, which was just as it should be.

With a relaxing of tenseness I returned to my work. But only for a few moments.

Some words I had written earlier in the story recurred to me: *"Vampires cast no reflection in mirrors."*

A little cold tremor passed over me. Then a spasm of fear-inspired anger at my childish timidity. Good Lord, to give a moment's credence to that Dracula clap-trap! I swung round and positively glared behind me.

There were no fearful fiends treading close behind me. There was nothing that had not been there before.

"Fool!" I addressed myself bitterly, and began to turn slowly back. En route, as it were, my eye flickered past a brass warming pan hanging on the side wall, and then abruptly flicked back to it. For I had the impression of a dim and shapeless sort of face staring from its bright round surface. I sat and regarded it.

Yes, there was certainly the effect of a face. An immobile, dead sort of face like that of the Man in the Moon and scarcely better defined.

I GOT up to examine it, and it faded as I approached it, and quite disappeared when I got my nose within a yard of it, leaving just the empty surface of the pan. Yet when I sat back again in my chair, there it was once more: two round black holes of eyes, a beaky nose, a twisted gash of a mouth.

Along the top of the sideboard on the opposite side of the room to it was an assemblage of objects of ornament and utility. Prominent among them were two ebony candlesticks, top-heavy things with round, bulbous sockets for the candles. It was plain to me that the eyes of the face were simply the reflection of these two black balls, the nose a partial and distorted reflection of a vase, and the mouth—probably a dent in the pan which caught and held a content of shadow at this particular angle.

I dismissed the matter, and returned again to my scribbled pages.

In a little while I came to a passage that I judged needed wholly re-writing, and I stared thoughtfully before me while I endeavored to cast it afresh in my mind.

Subconsciously at first, and then with a start of realization, I became cognizant that I was gazing straight at another face!

It was in the carving of one of the pillars of the fireplace. From the coils of raised stone ostensibly representing climbing vines, a demoniac little visage regarded me with sharp, slanting, spiteful eyes, a vulpine face, like that of a fox cornered and snarling. So alive and venomous did it seem that I instinctively moved back a little with confused ideas of defensive measures.

That slight movement was enough to make the illusion vanish. For it was an illusion, another trick of light. Yet though I experimented by changing my attitude in my chair, I could not get the effect to repeat itself. Indeed, I even became uncertain of the spot amid the intricacies of the carvings where it had seemed to appear.

Not very surely, I returned to my business. But it was a long while before I could put those two faces from my mind.

I HAD almost finished when that sickening feeling of being watched came over me again. For a little while I dared not raise my eyes from the papers that trembled in my hands. In my imagination it seemed to me that I was surrounded by a host of evil and silently threatening faces—that they leered and glowered not only from the dark corners but also from the bright surfaces of the things I had thought so homely

and reassuring when I had come in from the outer darkness.

With a sudden resolution to face them all and be damned to them, I looked up. I caught a fleeting impression of a huge face filling the whole wall of the empty alcove beside the fireplace, but the patches of discoloration from dampness that had apparently formed it seemed almost to shift apart in that instant and become wholly innocent and of no significance.

I threw my papers down and jumped up with an oath.

"What *is* this?" I demanded of myself. "Am I going mad? Or is something trying to drive me mad?"

I went determinedly round the room, gazing straightly at all its contents in turn, but I saw nothing in the least out of the ordinary. Then I stood in the middle of the hearthrug and debated upon my state of affairs.

Firstly, I had no further inclination to do any more work on my book tonight. I had had enough of pondering upon the sinister.

Secondly, I wished either that I had company or was in some less lonely spot in the countryside than I was. But outside the cottage was the wood, and outside the wood stretched the wide heath under the night sky—miles of black mystery between me and the nearest glow of humanity.

Thirdly, despite my day's unusual mental and physical effort, I no longer felt tired. Nor did the thought of bed lure me—I felt that if I did sleep now, bad dreams, if nothing worse, would come.

I decided that I would write some letters. Just to hold, as I wrote them, the mental image of some of those exuberant friends of mine in London (from whom I had fled!) would provide something of a sense of company. It would give me a link with that pleasant world of everyday from which I was so utterly cut off on this stifling, electrically ominous night.

The thought of letters caused me to wonder whether any had been delivered in the evening post while I had been out. I was already opening the little door of the letter cage when it occurred to me that I had deliberately withheld my address from all but Spencer.

Nevertheless, I groped irrationally in the dark interior and felt a little thrill of pleasure when my fingers encountered a letter, the only one. I felt something else, too—a mild shock which made those fingers tingle a bit. It was almost as if the letter had contained an electrical charge. I put it down to the atmosphere.

The letter was from Spencer, as I might have guessed. It wasn't very helpful looked at from any point of view. He was in his most cryptic mood.

It was in neat type-script and began without any preamble. It was signed ("Yours faithfully") by Spencer, and that seemed to me almost the only comprehensible part of it. As for the rest—well, here it is, word for word, as I remember it.

"ACLE.

The composer, Robert Schumann, long heard voices and saw things that were not there. He went mad.

ANGLE.

As did, in like manner, the anthor of *Gulliver's Travels*, Jonathan Swift.

AGRAM.

The poet, Shelley, was tormented all his life with dreams and visions. Once, in a waking vision, he encountered a figure shrouded in a dark cloak. It was—himself. On another occasion he heard a noise outside the country cottage where he was staying. He opened the door, and was struck unconscious by—something invisible.

AGERON.

When young, John Bunyan had 'fearful dreams and visions.' Pestilent spirits and devils appeared to him until he reached the age of seventeen. Then they disappeared for two years, during which time he gave himself up to every evil passion and led a corrupt life.

In 1651 his visions came again, and he said that he was hounded by the devil. He

swore that he sometimes 'felt the tempter pull my clothes' and sometimes the devil 'took the form of a hull, bush, or besom.'

All the demons in the *Pilgrim's Progress* came out of his memories of these experiences.

ALPHA.

William Blake, the poet and artist, had dreams and visions all his life. He left a record of not only how he saw the devil but also how he drew him. He wrote: 'I was going downstairs in the dark, when suddenly a light came streaming at my feet. I turned around, and there he was, looking fiercely at me through the iron grating of my staircase window. As he appeared, so I drew him.'

Blake's sketch showed a horrible phantom glaring through a grated window—with burning eyes, long teeth, and claws like talons.

William Blake went mad.

SO, my friend, remember while you are Pent up in your little cottage, to BEWARE of 'dreams and visions.' "

NO, DECIDEDLY not a cheering communication. I cursed the man for his perverted sense of humor—if this was supposed to be humor—and his maddening obscurantism.

But it struck me as strange that the arrival of such an effort as this should coincide with a time at which I was seeing things.

I sat down and studied the typed sheet with a frown.

"ACLE, AGRAM, AGERON . . ." What gibberish words were these? What connection was there between them?

If I guessed Spencer's twisted mind right, there was some link. Quite possibly he had put a clue in the wording. He was always searching for some such crazy but deliberate clues in the writings of Shakespeare to indicate that the plays were actually written by Francis Bacon.

I went slowly through the wordage again. Why, I pondered, a capital "P" for "Pent"?

Wait a moment — Pent-ACLE, Pent-AGRAM . . . ?

I seized upon a volume of my encyclopedia, and sought what I soon found—this entry:

"PENTACLE, PENTANGLE, PENTAGRAM, PENTAGERON, or PENTALPHA.

"These various names all belong to the design of a 5-pointed star, composed of 5 straight lines, which may be formed complete without severance of the tracing medium from the recording medium, i.e., it may be drawn without the pen being lifted from the paper, for the tip of the pen returns to its starting point. Possibly for some such oddity as this the sign has long been used as a mystic symbol, first by the Pythagoreans and later by the astrologers and necromancers of the Middle Ages. It is found frequently in early ornamental art, and is still sometimes used, in superstitious regions of the world, on doorways to keep away witches and evil spirits."

There followed representations of the Pentacle, etc., and "The Hexagram—two interlaced equilateral triangles—with which it is often confused."

While I had the "P" volume in my hand, I thought I might as well look up Pythagoras, of whom I knew nothing except that he had been a Greek philosopher with a theorem.

His time, it appeared, was the sixth century B.C., and he travelled around quite a lot, passing through Egypt among other places, and went to Italy in 529 B.C. and founded there a religious brotherhood for the reformation of mankind, through practising certain rites. Reaction against him began in his life-time and reached a head in the middle of the fifth century B.C. His movement was violently trampled out, meeting houses of Pythagoreans were everywhere sacked and burned and Pythagoreans persecuted and slain.

Well, all that was fairly interesting, I supposed, but I still didn't see any point to the letter. Yet there was still the coincidence of its arrival and my fit of the willies.

I lay back in my chair with half-closed eyes, pondering on the dreams and visions of the illustrious people Spencer had listed. I was a writer of sorts—an artist in my own particular line, I prided myself—but I had no illusions about my name living any longer than I did. A hundred years hence no one would be the slightest bit interested to learn that I had died in a mad-house or had regular bouts of *delirium tremens*.

For some time my mind dwelt upon the ephemerality of the second-rate writer's little fame, and then began to work in its usual way of putting two ideas together and fashioning from them something fresh. The slow shaping of a new story about a brilliant writer who went mad at the height of his fame went on in my imagination. I was lost in it.

Detachedly I became aware that the illumination of the room appeared to be slowly changing in its quality. The normal yellowy-white light of the oil lamp was taking on a faint tinge of green. I was still deep in abstraction, and paid little heed to it at first, but presently it became so pronounced that I took an absent-minded look at the lamp. It was very low. I remembered in a vague sort of way that I had forgotten to get any more paraffin. The greenish light was coming from somewhere on my left, where the window was, and I thought it was some queer effect of the moonlight shining in. I glanced over at the window, and my heart gave a bound that I thought had displaced it. A sort of silent screaming horror held me paralyzed.

The window was a square of greenly translucent light, as though it were the side of an artificially illuminated aquarium, and glaring through it at me was William Blake's nightmare vision of the devil.

The eyes burned into mine, the fangs were revealed in a tiger's grin—the whole effect was that of a monster aflame with sadistic appetite measuring its distance for a pounce at my throat.

I'm afraid I fainted. It's a weakness no man likes to admit to, but it does happen. It happened to me, and I'm very thankful it did.

When I came to, the oil lamp was but a mere glimmer, reflected like a star in the black opacity of the window before me. For there was no trace left of my frightful visitant. The night outside was as dark as a cavern deep in the earth, and no shape of anything, not even the adjacent pines, could be discerned.

I got up, shaking like an ancient car, and had to lean on the table for a few moments while I cured my knees of their curious tendency to give. Then in a tremhling but swift manner I became urgent with action.

First, I slammed home the bolts of the door. I didn't now why the thing hadn't come in after me that way, but I wasn't going to give it the advantage of any second thoughts.

THEN I pulled the thick curtain over the window. I was afraid to go near the window to do this; I might suddenly find myself literally face to face with the thing, and I didn't think my heart would stand it. So I hooked the curtain over with the end of a broomstick, and I was holding myself well away from the other end of it.

Then I laid the poker on the table ready for emergencies. It was a comfortahly heavy length of iron.

And then I had a couple of neat whiskies.

There was nothing I could do about the lamp. There wasn't any more oil and I wasn't going out to search for any at this time of night. The very thought of feeling about among the unseen trees out there again made me shudder. I found a stub of candle and lit it, but it wasn't going to last long.

So I built a huge fire. On that sultry summer night I had a blaze going that near melted me. But I didn't mind feeling warm so long as I could feel more secure. And hright firelight was a sight better than absolute darkness.

I sat close by the fire, streaming with sweat, my poker at hand, and I resolved not to let that lighb fail nor myself sleep until dawn and the blessed daylight came.

My eye fell on Spencer's letter on the table. I had had enough of that sort of thing. I reached over and grabbed it, and was about to drop it into the fire when I

noticed for the first time a diagram traced on the back of it.

It was a pentagram, executed with extremely neat draughtmanship in very thin lines of what appeared to be green ink.

As I studied it, it seemed to stand out from the paper as though it were embossed. And then the paper appeared to fade away from around it, leaving the pentagram like a green wire frame. And the wire began to glow until the center of my vision was nothing but a blankness in which the pentagram glowed like a green neon sign, which grew bigger and bigger.

The friendly firelight was being blotted out. And now there were faces, *faces*, grinning and leering faces pressing all about me, an increasing crowd, and a green light brightening and glowing over everything.

The last dwindling remnant of my will just managed to snap the spell, like the wrench with which one sometimes breaks out of the hypnosis of a nightmare. And in that snap, the horrors vanished, and there I was sitting in the firelight with just an ordinary piece of paper in my hand.

But not for long. In a spasm of fear and rage I screwed it into a ball and threw it into the heart of the fire. There was a brief spurt of green flame. It might have been a pinch of some chemical in one of the logs.

I stayed awake all night, but I was not troubled further by visions.

IN THE morning, I packed my things and fled back to London. Dear old dirty—but safe—Bloomsbury, with the shabby temple of the British Museum, and the little streets full of foreign dining-rooms and bookshops, and the captive trees in the grimy squares!

As soon as I had got resettled in my apartment, I marched round to Mecklenburgh Square to demand of Spencer what the hell?

Though callers for him were few and far between, he had fitted a Yale lock to the door of his big bed-sitting-room at the top of the gray house, and he kept the door shut and himself on the other side of it. But he had long trusted me with a key.

I got no answer when I knocked, so I let myself in.

There was his desk in the far corner, littered with books and papers as usual, and there was his old-fashioned wing armchair, in which he spent more time asleep than in his bed, but there was no sign of him.

Of course, he might be doing some research in the Museum Reading Room. On the other hand he might be out eating in one of the neighboring cafés. I presumed he did eat sometimes, though I had never seen him at it. But those were the only reasons that I could imagine would ever take him out of this room.

He took no exercise and had no use for fresh air. How he managed to find the oxygen to breathe in this place I could never understand. The door and window were always shut. I walked over to and had a struggle with the window, but it was quite immovable; through years of neglect, window and frame had amalgamated.

I sat myself in his armchair glancing idly about the room. Every available wall space, from floor to ceiling, was taken up with laden bookshelves—the famous library on the black art, demonology, spiritualism, and every aspect of the supernatural. There was his large double bed in the corner, unmade as always, its tangled clothes draping down on the carpet. The stained old coffee pot stood on the hearth, and there were cigarette stubs thrown anywhere about the floor.

Standing like a rock in the sea of documents, letters, files, clippings, pamphlets and allied paper matter which flowed over the desk was Spencer's typewriter. There was a sheet of paper in it half filled with typescript. Curious to learn what Spencer was working on now, I got up and had a look at it.

I found it was page four of a letter obviously addressed to me, so I looked on the desk for the previous sheets and found them. As far as the letter went, I read it with absorption:

"Dear Bill,

"I suppose when this reaches you, you will be cursing me for a sleepless night. Probably you will have found the immediate

cause of it. If not, this letter will enlighten you, so that you can destroy the said cause and sleep the sleep of the innocent.

"Consider the humble pentagram. It's become a jolly little figure of fun now—good luck, and all that sort of thing. You might get it in the form of a lucky charm from a Christmas cracker or see a dozen of it representing stars in the illustrations to children's fairy story books.

"Business men who like playing at secret societies (which are also good for business) use it for a secret recognition symbol between one member and another. They copied that trick from the Pythagoreans. But the Pythagoreans were alive to the dread secret they shared, and which they kept from the ordinary people. Yet even these philosopher-geometricians were a bit astray upon one point.

"Because they traced manifestations to the presence of a pentagram of a certain size and shape, they thought that the secret lay in that certain size and shape. And certainly the same effects were brought about through using exact duplicates of that original pentagram.

"But the whole secret really lies in just one triangle of that figure. The surface size is irrelevant, and the rest of the pentagram frame redundant. It's the *angles* of that one triangle which are important. Fashion a triangle with its three angles of sizes I could give you (though an error amounting to a second will suffice to make it impotent) and you will have a triangle of terror indeed.

"I'll tell you that one angle is 36° 47′ 29″ if you want to play games with trial and error. When you hit upon the right one and leave it about, you'll start seeing things sooner or later. But your chances are small. It is not an isosceles triangle, but a scalene. The original pentagram was a very rough effort, far from symmetrical, and only by a fluke did it contain this dangerous triangle.

"How did I discover all this? It began with my investigation of the haunting of a cottage in Norfolk. I connected the phenomena with a small glass prism which had been lying about the place (the former occupant was a spectroscopist—until he went mad and was put away). On a couple of occasions when the spooks were about to appear, I noticed that this prism took on a palely translucent quality of green. Proceeding according to scientific method, I found that the cottage was not haunted if the prism was taken away from it. But the vicinity of the prism was, wherever one took it. I had a rather unpleasant time discovering that—I must tell you about it sometime.

"UNFORTUNATELY, I dropped the prism one day and broke a corner off. And it was never the same again. It became just another piece of glass. But I had taken exact measurements of it, and I kept them.

"Years later, I traced, by exhaustive trial and error, the cause of another haunting—in a residential house on Putney Common—to the presence of (of all things!) a paper-fastener. A triangular one. I took careful measurements of this, and compared them with the dimensions of that remembered prism. I knew I had hit upon something when I found that its angles—though not the area enclosed by them—corresponded absolutely exactly with the angles of one of the (naturally) triangular ends of the prism, the end I had broken.

"I'm afraid I didn't keep my evidence long. I was so troubled by 'dreams and visions' as long as it was in my possession that I was finally driven to bending it out of shape. That made it harmless. A simple little action like that.

"But I found plenty of confirmatory evidence. That haunted riverside bungalow at Teddington: I removed and destroyed one of those common triangular shelf brackets, and got the credit for exorcising the spirits! Do you know why Burlham Rectory is still known as 'the most haunted house in Britain'? Because I couldn't get permission to attack a beam completing a triangle of one of the gables!

"I tell you, you've only got to look around any of these 'haunted' houses, and know what you're looking for, and you'll find the cause of the trouble sooner or later. It may be a fortuitous triangle of scratches on the

wall, a coat-hanger, or even the side of a pepper-pot. But it's always there.

"When I was making researches into the history of the Pythagoreans, I found the secret was known to them centuries before the time of Christ, only they mistook the pentagram for the cause and not just the triangle contained therein. They used to practice the rites of raising these unpleasant apparitions, and then conquering them by destroying the sign. They felt purified by the struggle with evil and uplifted by the symbolic victory over it. I'm not sure, though, that they always had the victory . . .

"Naturally, they kept these dark secrets from common men, but the people gradually got wind of it, feared and hated them as sorcerers and tried to expunge them. The persecution reached its height in the middle of the 5th century B.C.; everywhere the meeting houses of the Pythagoreans were burned down and any Pythagoreans found there slain.

"You're probably wondering why a particular kind of triangle should cause such phenomena, anyway. So am I. I'm still investigating.

"My own theory at the moment goes like this: Firstly, these devils and demons which appear have no material existence, and, in fact, no existence at all—*outside your own mind!* They exist in our unconscious mind, memories we are born with, handed down from our most primitive ancestors.

"Do you remember when you were a child, alone in your own bedroom, trying to sleep, those uneasy times when you imagined you saw faces—nasty, glare-eyed, frightening faces—in the darkness of your room? And when you shut your eyes to escape them, there they were behind your eyelids, clearer than ever? They are the things our terror dreams are built upon.

"Children see them more than we do, for the imagination is so much more active in childhood. In adults it gradually grows moribund and we become creatures of habit. But very sensitive and imaginative people, who live more in their unconscious mind than their conscious one, the introverts, still see them.

"Very sensitive and imaginative people, I repeat—like artists, poets, composers . . . like Blake, Shelley, Schumann. You know to get the idea? *'The music-makers . . . and the dreamers of dreams.'*

"Far more strongly than extroverted, materialistic people—I can't imagine those business men having much trouble with their pentagrams, even if by a remote chance they hit upon a Pythagorean one—they react to this touchstone of a triangle. It acts as a sort of gateway through which seep ever more strongly the images and thought-waves of the unconscious, until they flood over and submerge the conscious mind altogether. And when that happens to a man we say he is mad. The conscious mind weighs and judges, it is our critical faculty, it keeps us in balanced relation to the material world. But when it is gone, we are helpless. We will believe in anything that our unconscious mind believes in, for that wholly possesses us now.

"Why haven't all great men, like Beethoven, Shakespeare, da Vinci, gone mad? Why only a small proportion? I anticipate your questions. Well, simply because they never happened to come into juxtaposition with one of these triangles. But the ones I have listed, and many others that I have not, must have had that triangle somewhere about their houses. Or, quite conceivably, within their own physical body—a bone structure or vein formation or some such freak effect.

"It seems that physical vision of the triangle is not necessary. Extra-sensory perception is pretty firmly established, and I am inclined to believe that the design is perceived extra-sensorily if it is close at hand. It seems to exert an hypnotic effect on the subject's mind, but in just what manner is yet to be discovered. What are thought-waves, anyway, and may not they react only against certain designs, as a certain design of antennæ is needed to catch television waves? Come to that, what is imagination?

"It is because you are a writer and therefore have some amount of imagination that I sent you my little puzzle—and pentagram. It should have had some amusing results. However, I don't think they will have been

harmful—I had read your books and assessed the quality of your imagination, and I don't think you need fear the fate of the writers I have mentioned.

"After all, once you fully realize that these phantoms only emerge from your own mind, it should—"

THE letter ended there, in mid-sentence, which I thought a little odd.

This was the first I had heard of Spencer carrying out practical investigation of hauntings—any sort of action seemed so unlike him. Had he been called away to one now, I wondered?

If Spencer had judged the quality of my imagination solely from my books, he was at fault. I'm not nearly so matter-of-fact as the style of those books suggests. That style is a pose to cover up an almost morbid sensitivity. I may not be as highly-strung as were any of the writers Spencer had listed, but I certainly didn't think last night's results "amusing," and I shouldn't have liked to predict the outcome if I hadn't destroyed the pentagram in time.

No, when Spencer returned, he was going to find that in me he had reaped a whirlwind.

Meanwhile, I would give him another half-hour before I went and had lunch.

I sat down pondering upon the incredible revelations of the letter. Yet from my independent experience, I could not doubt the truth of them.

I wondered whether it was possible to cure cases of madness caused that way. There was a chance of—

At that moment I caught sight of something that sent an electric shock through me. The sole of a shoe, just under Spencer's large bed, partially hidden by the carelessly flung bedclothes. And this sole was balancing upright on its toe, a position impossible unless that shoe contained a human foot. There was somebody lying face-downwards under the bed.

I had to force myself to go over and investigate. It was Spencer, as I had feared, and he was dead. He had forced himself under the bed as far as his bulk would allow, and I had a strenuous time getting him out—there was a sort of horrible ludicrousness about those efforts.

But when I saw his face I didn't think there was anything in the least funny about it. Both mouth and eyes were wide open. (Something about the countenance reminded me of the cast in the Pompeii Museum of the poor unfortunate who was suffocated in terror beneath the ashes of the eruption which buried his city.) And the irises of the eyes were turned slightly in and upwards like those of a man in an apoplectic fit. It was a ghastly effect.

And I knew he had been seeking refuge in a blinding animal fear from something which had literally scared the life out of him. Poor Spencer—what an impossible and ridiculous refuge he had flown to! What awful presence had unbalanced such a scholarly mind, broken such a firm character, made a tragic clown out of such a mature and wise man?

Of course, according to his own theory he would be very susceptible to these frightening visions from the unconscious, because he lived so largely in the recesses of his own mind and was usually more than semi-oblivious to his surroundings and his company.

Yes, his own discovery must have destroyed him.

And then I was struck by an appalling realization. This couldn't have happened without the imminent presence of that terrible triangle. It must still be somewhere about, in all probability somewhere in this room.

If I weren't careful . . . ! Panic thoughts chased about in my brain. I attempted to get a grip upon myself. I stood up. It was quite obvious what I must do—I must go straight away and inform the police.

Was that something moving over there by the door?

WHETHER it was or not, fear suddenly closed in upon my soul. I felt sick in the stomach, and my whole body began to tremble. A secondary reaction from last night's horror now joined forces with the shocks of these fresh discoveries. Images of the triangle I feared kept trying to shape

in my too lively imagination. I fought to keep it out of my mind.

"I must get out of here, I must get out of here," I was muttering to myself. I essayed a rather shaky step towards the door, and then stopped with an indrawn gasp as though a bucket of very cold water had been thrown over me.

Between the door and myself stood a tall, yet slightly hunched, creature out of the worst of my childhood nightmares. A mad drooling thing, with a face rotten with corruption, with dead blinkless eyes that seemed to be gazing past me and yet I knew that they were not: in reality, the thing's whole attention was upon me. But it was not an intelligent attention. It was the unthinking, unreflecting, but blindly eager attention of the slavering and snuffling village idiot who slowly and deliberately pulls the legs off a spider or takes a knife to a captive sparrow and works unimaginable cruelties upon it.

And this thing was after me.

Cold sweat broke out upon me.

My conscious mind was hammering away: "It isn't real. It isn't real. It won't hurt you. It's just your own imagination. You're becoming hypnotized. Break the spell. Look away."

I dragged my eyes from it, and my gaze fell full upon Spencer lying dead at my feet, on his back, his queer eyes seeming to strive to see his own forehead. With a sob, I stumbled across him, and gained the fireplace. I clung to the mantel-shelf, still keeping my gaze averted from the direction of the door.

The stained coffee pot on the hearth was —looking up at me. It had become a face, with a grotesque spout of a nose—it was one of the leering faces I had seen last night.

With a quite uncalculated action, like a reflex kick, I lifted it violently with the toe of my shoe and it went smashing into fragments against the farther wall.

That was an unexpected relief. In sudden hope I dared a glance towards the door.

But the slobbering, staring thing was as real and as potentially murderous as ever. It had advanced considerably towards me, and now I could see details of it that I wished I could not. Its dead-white hands were reaching out ready to clutch and grip. It seemed inexorably sure of itself. And, adding to my terror, it moved with absolute soundlessness. If it breathed, I could not hear it. It approached me like an image from an old silent film, a moving shadow.

"It *is* a shadow," said one part of my mind. "Only a shadow that you are throwing."

And another voice was shoutiog, "The window! Escape by the window!"

And another voice was saying, "The window is jammed. You can't open it."

My mind was a roaring confusion of divided impulses, all overridden by the dominating rush of fear.

I knew that it was disintegrating. That my conscious mind was going to pieces under the strain, and when that salivating horror got me I should go screaming mad. As others had gone mad.

I made one last desperate effort to clear a space in that chaos in which to think connectedly.

The triangle. This was all happening through the medium of the triangle. I must find it. There was not a moment to lose. I must destroy it.

Quick, where—*what*—could it be?

Was it a bracket of that pipe rack? I tore it down and smashed it. But without looking, I knew that I was still pursued.

God, there were a thousand things in this room that might contain it!

I went through a brief fury of breaking every suspicious thing I could lay my hands upon, within my limited radius. But still I was forced to retreat, until I was pressing against the desk in the far corner from the door and, shaking like a paralytic, I could retreat no further.

I think I was beginning to scream voicelessly as I scrabbled in mad desperation among the books and papers on the desk, my eyes literally bulging with anxiety in their baffled search for something triangular.

In one convulsive sweep I shot a whole heap of the clutter from the desk. It revealed the blotting pad that pile had cov-

ered. In the center of the blotting pad was a familiar outline in green ink. The pentagram.

I knew it was what I sought. I pounced on it like a wild animal and ripped it across. And ripped again. Then I turned around weakly with the pieces in my hand.

The thing which had almost had its fingers on my throat was gone.

I began to chuckle feebly, and kept tearing the blotting pad across and across again, tossing the small pieces in the air; they fluttered to the floor like a miniature stage snowstorm.

Like Wellington after Waterloo, I kept saying to myself: "A near run thing! A near run thing!"

And all because of the fact that when old Spencer had drawn so carefully that representation of the pentagram he sent me, he had blotted it on his pad, and never noticed that he had left a perfect reproduction of those dangerous angles among his papers.

That was his undoing. I suppose. I suppose he *was* frightened to death.

The doctor diagnosed coronary thrombosis, and the coroner saw fit to agree with him. Sometimes these days I catch myself trying to agree with him, too. It is human to rationalize.

But I do know that I am never under any conditions, going to play about with any triangles that include one angle of 36° 47′ 29″. In fact, I am allergic to triangles of any kind.

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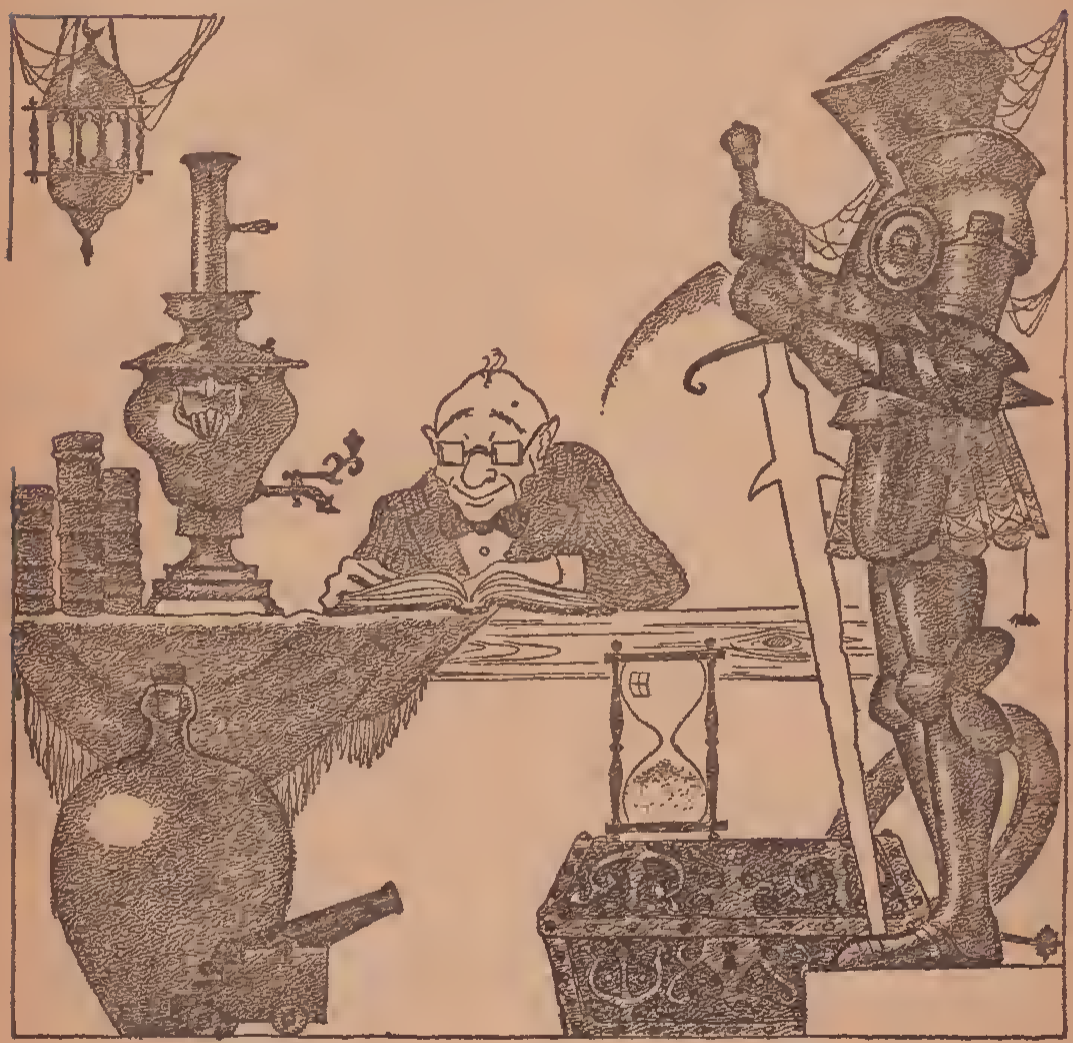
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The Monkey Spoons

BY MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN



THE little shop seemed to have taken the musty, worm-eaten quality of furniture and relics it offered for sale. There was an all-pervasive odor of mildew and decaying wood. Dust motes whirled in a shaft of sunlight as the street door opened, with the hushed tinkle of a bell above the sedate gold letters: JONATHAN SPROULL, ANTIQUES.

"Funeral spoons. . . . What a gift for a man to give his bride!"

Heading by Boris Dolgov

The three young people who entered, arm in arm, looked as out of place in such a shop as three children at a board meeting. The girl, a vivacious brunette with a large diamond solitaire on her left hand, linked the two men together—one a tall, easy-going Norse blond, the other small, wiry, and dark, with sensitive features that resembled those of the girl. They stood for a moment, laughing and chattering together—but in lowered tones, somewhat subdued by the atmosphere of the old shop.

"No, no; not three rings, Bob. Rings are so trite," the girl was protesting. "What we want is something unusual—eh, Alan? Something distinctive to link us three together always, like the Three Musketeers, and remind us of our undying . . ."

She broke off with a stifled gasp as a stooped, wrinkled gnome of a man, a hunchback, scuttled out from the shadowy recesses at the rear of the place. There was something spider-like about his appearance, until he smiled. Large luminous brown eyes beamed upon each of them in turn.

"I overheard," he murmured in a mellow friendly voice that matched his eyes. "You are looking for some little memento?" His eyes drifted keenly to the girl. "Soon is your wedding day—yes?" he hazarded. "And you and your . . . your brother? . . . and your fiance wish to buy some antique curio, in (revolting term!) triplicate? As a bond of love and remembrance?"

The trio glanced at one another, jaws dropping.

"Why—yes!" the girl laughed. "You must be psychic!"

"Observation, merely observation and deduction," the old proprietor chuckled pleasantly. "I have very little trade here, worse luck, and much time to meditate! . . . Now, what did you have in mind? Three identical snuffboxes, perhaps? 17th Century? Or what about lockets, Renaissance Italian, with your pictures in each? I have some that fold open in three sections. Two of them could be worn as watchfobs, of course," he smiled at the two utterly unlike but congenial young men.

They grinned back at him, wandering curiously among the cluttered displays of crow's-nest tables, hammered brass fire-dogs, old spinning wheels, and a hundred other reminders of generations past. Idly they wandered over to a showcase of antique silverware—ornate gold-and-silver sugar shells, pickle forks with tiny demons on the handle, little salt spoons, and graceful kris-shaped butter knives. The girl strolled away by herself, poking about with quiet fascioation. Presently her eyes fell on a small, worn, black velvet case pushed half out of sight on a shelf. She leaned to open it, and called out eagerly:

"Look! Oh, Alan—Bob, look! I found some monkey spoons!" She beckoned to her brother and fiance, theo smiled across the shop at the old proprietor—whose sudden look of agitation she failed to notice. "These *are* monkey spoons, aren't they, Mr. Sproull? I've never seen any with a drinking monkey perched on the knop—it's always something stylized, a faun or a skull. Tbese must be very old."

The two men moved to her side, fondly amused at her excitement. The blond one, Bob, looked at the dark one, Alan, and spread his hands bumorously.

"What on earth," he drawled, "are monkey spoons? Alan, if we're going to open that antique shop of ours, with my backing and Marcia's and your experience, you'll just have to brief me on these . . ."

THE brother and sister started explaining, both at once, interrupting each other. They gave up, laughing. Then suddenly Mr. Sproull stepped forward, edging unobtrusively between the three young people and the black velvet box.

"Monkey spoons," he explained diffidently, "were presented by the old Dutch patroons to honored guests and relatives, as late as the 17th Century. They were mementoes of some occasion—a funeral, most often. As you can see from these very fine specimens—." Skillfully, he steered the trio away to another showcase, shutting the black velvet box hehind him with a furtive gesture. "These," he pointed out one set of five, "are typical. Note the wide, shallow, fluted bowl of the spoon—very thin silver—bearing a hammered-out picture symbolic

of funerals: a man on horseback delivering the invitations, with a churchyard in the background. These bear a likeness of St. Michael, weigher of souls on Judgment Day. This one has a picture of a mourner weeping over a cinerary urn . . ."

"Br-r! Cheerful little trinkets, aren't they?" Bob laughed, resting one hand on Alan's shoulder and sliding his other arm about his fiancee's waist. "Mean to say they passed out these things at funerals, like flowers at a party?"

"Not exactly." Mr. Sproull smiled. "They were hung around the rim of the punch bowl at the *Dood Feest*—'dead feast.' Something like the Irishman's wake. A small silver lozenge, the seal, was always welded at the center of the handle, engraved with the name of the deceased, and the dates of his birth and death. The handles are quite slender, as you see. They curl backwards like the end of a violin to form the knop—on which is mounted a silver faun, or a skull, or . . ."

"Or a monkey?" the girl asked eagerly. "Why 'monkey' spoons, Mr. Sproull?" She drifted over to the black box again and picked up one spoon. "I've always wondered why they're called that."

"That," the old dealer shrugged his humped shoulders, "is an enigma among antique experts. One theory is that the monkey was simply a symbolic invitation to come and be gay at the *Dood Feest*. 'Eat, drink, and be merry,' you know, 'for tomorrow . . .' *Zuiging der monkey* was an old Dutch expression meaning 'to get drunk' . . ."

"Ugh!" Marcia's delicate nose wrinkled in distaste. "I certainly wouldn't want everybody getting soused at *my* funeral! They'll just have to sit around and cry soberly, or they'll get no monkey spoons from me! Remember that, now, Bob!" She laughed and planted a kiss on her fiance's cheek.

"Hush!" Her brother, the more sensitive of the two men, shuddered visibly. "Marcia, don't be so morbid! People shouldn't joke about . . ."

"Who's morbid?" the girl laughed more gaily, winking at Bob. "Oh, Alan, you're a sissy! Do come and look at these darling monkey spoons over here. Those with the drinking monkey are very rare—aren't they, Mr. Sproull? There are only three of these . . ."

Her face lighted, and she whirled about at a sudden idea.

"Oh! Why don't we choose these for our keepsakes? I could have mine made into a scarf pin, Bob. Yours and Alan's could be watchfobs, or you could have them welded on silver cigarette cases! Some old Dutchman's funeral spoons! Wouldn't that be just too gruesome and clever? And," she added eagerly, "we can call our antique shop *The Three Spoons* . . . and people will drop in by the droves just to ask us why! . . . Bob, darling, please buy them!"

Her fiance grinned at her fondly, winked at her discomforted brother, and reached for his checkbook with a light shrug.

"All right, my precious, all right! Anything your foolish little heart desires. . . . But, funeral spoons!" He roared with amusement. "What a gift from the groom to the bride! Mr. Sproull, how much are you asking for . . . ?"

He broke off, caught by the expression on the face of the hunchbacked antique dealer. Mr. Sproull looked frightened. There was no mistaking that quiver about his mouth, or the agitation in his kindly old eyes.

"I . . . I . . . Wouldn't you prefer something less expensive?" he blurted. "Those particular spoons are . . . almost a collector's item. Besides," he added in an oddly loud tone, "they are not mine to sell, really. *They are not mine!*"

He emphasized the words queerly, and glanced toward the dark rear of the shop as though he were speaking for the benefit of some skulking eavesdropper whom they could not see.

"The former owner," he lowered his voice again in apology, "was a Mrs. Haversham, an elderly widow. Her heirs have not yet been located. She . . . she died intestate about a month ago, shortly after buying the set of four monkey spoons at an auction. She kept one spoon, and left three of them with me to sell for her at a profit. Merely as her a*gent*," he emphasized sharply, with another odd glance toward a par-

ticularly dark corner. "She kept a fourth spoon, not wanting to part with her entire collection. She . . . she was asphixiated in her garage," he added with apparent irrelevance. "Carbon monoxide gas from her car. An *accidental* death, of course!" he said quickly, again with that nervous glance into the shadows.

THE girl Marcia, her fiance Bob, and her brother Alan looked at one another significantly. The old hunchback was certainly peculiar, to say the least! *A borderline mental case,* Bob's raised eyebrows suggested. With a glance at his fiancee's disappointed expression, he became brisk and businesslike.

"Well—you have the legal right to sell the spoons, though. And collect your commission," he pointed out shrewdly. "How much?"

"Ah . . . five hundred dollars," Mr. Sproull murmured, then added with a manner of pleading: "That's exorbitant, of course, and I can find you something much more attractive for the price!"

"Exorbitant—you can say that again! For three little spoons?" the blond young man whistled good-humoredly, but uncapped his fountain pen.

"Er . . . that's five hundred dollars *apiece.*" Mr. Sproull said hurriedly. "For each spoon. . . . Now, I'm sure you wouldn't care to pay so much for a . . . a whim! Let me just show you . . ."

Bob set his jaw stubbornly, giving the old dealer an oblique look.

"Mr. Sproull, don't you *want* to make this sale? Look. If you're trying to run up the price," he snapped, "just because my fiancee has taken such a fancy to . . ." He broke off, grinned abruptly, and spread his hands in rueful defeat. "All right, you old pirate! Fifteen hundred it is!" He smiled indulgently at the girl beside him, who was shaking her head violently. "If it's something you really want, darling, you shall have it."

Old Mr. Sproull sighed deeply, with a tone of resignation rather than of satisfaction.

"The price," he said heavily, "is five hundred for the set, if you insist on buying it . . . But I must tell you this, although I am sure you young people will laugh at me—or perhaps be even more intrigued by these . . . these devilish spoons! You see, they . . ." Mr. Sproull gulped. "They are supposed to be cursed."

The two men did laugh, but the girl's face lighted up. She clapped her hands, as pleased as a child with its first jack-o-lantern.

"Oh—a *curse!* How marvelous! Why didn't you tell us before? Now I simply *must* have them!"

The old hunchback nodded, and shrugged. "As I predicted," he murmured, then doggedly. "The spoons are mementoes of the funeral of an old Dutch patroon—Schuyler Van Grooten; you'll see his name on the seals—who owned and tenant-farmed about half of the Connecticut Valley in the 1600's. Mrs. Haversham had an old Dutch diary written by one of his ancestors; I was able to translate only a few pages when I called at her home, but . . . It seems there were thirteen spoons originally. Rather a significant unlucky number, as the patroon was secretly murdered by friends and relatives who would inherit his estate. One by one, the story goes, he caused six guilty ones to die—exactly as he himself had died. The remaining owners of the monkey spoons became frightened finally and gave theirs away, thereby escaping his vengeance. *But . . .*"

"But anybody who owns the spoons inherits the curse? Is that it?" Marcia cried delightedy. "Alan, isn't it exciting? Oh Bob, do give Mr. Sproull a check before somebody comes in and buys our haunted spoons right out from under our noses!"

The antique dealer looked at her, and sighed. He saw the girl's brother bite his lips, frowning. But the blond young man grinned at his fiancee, and wrote out a check for the three monkey spoons. Opening the black velvet box, he presented one of the spoons to Marcia with an exaggerated bow. The second he gave to Alan, holding it over his wrist like a proffered rapier. The third spoon he thrust carelessly into the pocket of his tweed coat.

Then, laughing at his horse-play, Marcia offered an arm to each of the two young men, and they marched out together, whistling in harmony, into the sunlit street.

Behind them, old Mr. Sproull—although he was not a very devout Catholic—crossed himself. He ran a finger around under his collar and inhaled noisily, aware all at once of the extreme stuffiness of his little shop. It was unusually *close* in here today, he thought; almost stifling. He scurried to a window and flung it open, gulping in lungfuls of cool autumn air . . . as if, for some reason, he found it *terribly hard to breath.*

IT WAS almost closing time, about a week later, when the bell over his door tinkled again and two of the attractive young threesome walked into his shop. Mr. Sproull scuttled forward to meet them, beaming in recognition. But his smile faded at sight of the grim expression on the blond man's face, and the stunned, swollen-eyed look of the pretty girl. She had been crying, the old dealer saw—and Bob, her fiance, was tight-lipped and cold with anger.

"Yes?" Mr. Sproull murmured hesitantly. "You . . . were not satisfied with your purchase?" An odd look of hope leaped into his eyes. "You wish to return the spoons, perhaps? Of course, I shall be glad to refund your . . ."

For answer, the blond young man thrust one of the delicate little monkey spoons under his nose, pointing to the tiny silver seal welded at the center of the handle.

"Is this your idea of a joke?" he snapped.

The antique dealer blinked, and, putting on an old-fashioned pair of square-lensed spectacles, peered at the spoon. The blood ebbed slowly from his face.

"I . . . I don't understand," he stammered. "When I sold them to you, the inscriptions read: *Schuyler Van Grooten, Born August 3, 1586, Died June 8, 1631.* But now . . . now it reads *Alan Fentress, Born Sept. 14, 1924; Died Nov. 3, 1949* . . . Why," he broke off, "that's yesterday!"

A sob burst from the girl, and she buried her face against her fiance's shoulder, weeping wildly. Bob glared at Mr. Sproull.

"Yes!" he said harshly. "And Alan was drowned yesterday—November 3rd, 1949! The death-date engraved on that damned . . . *How the devil did you get hold of Alan's spoon?*" He towered over the old cripple threateningly. "You . . . sadistic old . . . ! *You* took that seal off, didn't you? And welded the new one on, just to . . . to stir up some freak publicity and boom trade for your crumby little shop! But, Alan!" he ground out through clenched teeth. "Why did you have to pick on Alan? Because you knew he was moody and susceptible to suggestion? Because you knew he'd brood over your little hoax, not telling us? His painting wasn't going well lately . . . so you thought it would be a cinch to drive him to suicide! Out there in the lake yesterday, he . . . he just stopped swimming and went under. When I got his clothes from the locker room, I found this damned spoon you changed! Like a death-sentence . . . !"

Mr. Sproull gasped, looking first at the dead youth's angry friend, then at his grieving sister.

"Oh! Oh *no*!" he protested. "My dear young people, you surely don't accuse *me* of . . . ? You're upset. Who wouldn't be? It's the curse," he said quietly. "Remember, I did my best to warn you . . ."

"To plant your story, you mean!" the young man snarled. Glaring at him furiously, he lead the girl toward the door. "Come on, darling. I might have known we'd get no satisfaction out of this . . . this cold-blooded old ghoul! . . . But let me tell you," he threw back furiously at the antique dealer, "when I locate the engraver who changed that inscription, or find out how you learned Alan's birth date . . . I'll come back here and kill you!"

The door slammed with an agitated jingle of the little bell. Mr. Sproull stood for a moment, wringing his hands miserably. He had liked those three light-hearted young people on sight, and would not for the world have wished harm to befall any of them. But . . . there were forces a crippled old man could not combat! Forces older than any item in his musty little shop. Older than logic. Older than time . . .

"Oh, dear heaven!" the hunchback

moaned. "Why didn't I tell them to give those other two spoons away? Melt them down, bury them—anything! If that diary had only told *how* Van Grooten died, perhaps I could have warned them to avoid. . . . But there were only hints! The writer never did come out and say. . . . But that young man is intelligent. Perhaps he could come to some conclusion that I've missed . . .!"

He turned and ran for the telephone directory, leafing through it hastily to find the names *Fentress* or *Milam*, the signature on the young man's check. For an hour he clung to the phone, calling every Fentress and Milam in the book—but there was no "Robert" Milam. Mr. Sproull tried the hotels, then the funeral homes to trace the dead brother, Alan. Finally he hung up, defeated, concluding that they were all from out of town. He sat staring at the telephone then, wringing his wrinkled old hands in the helpless anguish of one who can only wait . . . wait . . . for disaster.

But the period of waiting was not long.

THREE days later, just at noon, the doorbell tinkled again. Mr. Sproull looked up from a six-branched candelabra he was polishing, to see a disheveled figure swaying a few feet from him. It was Bob Milam, his face drawn and covered with a stubble of beard, his eyes bloodshot and puffy from drinking. In his hand be held an ugly little automatic.

Mr. Sproull caught his breath, and stood very still. Then, despite his own fear, he burst out:

"Oh, my poor young friend! The . . . the second spoon? Your . . . fiancee?"

The blond man's mouth twisted with pain and bitterness. For reply, he flung another of the monkey spoons at the old dealer's feet. Mr. Sproull stooped to pick it up. He paled, and nodded. The tiny oval seal on the handle was engraved to read:

Marcia Fentress
Born April 17, 1927
Died November 6, 1949

At the old man's nod, Bob's eyes narrowed. He said not a word, but the ominous click of the safety catch on his gun was eloquent enough. Yet there was more pity than terror in Mr. Sproull's face.

"Ohh!" His murmur of shocked sympathy had a genuine ring. "H-how did she . . .?"

"My fiancee," the young man grated bitterly, "was terribly grief-stricken at her brother's death—you figured on that, too, didn't you? You insane, twisted . . .!" His voice broke on a sob of impotent rage. "Alan and Marcia were inseparable; we three were, in fact. Marcia couldn't sleep, so last night she took a big dose of sleeping pills. While . . ." He gulped, then plunged on miserably, "While she was drugged, a . . . a very large beauty pillow on her bed fell over her face, somehow. She . . . It wasn't the sleeping pills; she . . . smothered to death! The coroner called it an accident," he lashed out. "But I call it murder! You murdered Alan, too! I can't prove it, but I surely as hell can . . .!"

With a sob he leveled the gun at the old antique dealer's heart, his mouth working with hate and grief. At sight of his tortured young face, Mr. Sproull dabbed at his eyes, oblivious to his own danger.

"My poor, unfortunate young friend!" he murmured pityingly. "You can't believe I would cause such tragedy, for a few paltry dollars? I did not change those seals—but I can not hope to persuade anyone as matter-of-fact as yourself to believe in . . . in the supernatural. The diary recounts that . . . that, when each guest at Van Grooten's Dood Feest died, *their* spoons changed, too! Mrs. Haversham's seal altered also—the lawyer found it later among her effects, but assumed it to be the grim jest of some house-servant . . ."

Bob Milam snorted derisively. But the murderous anger in his eyes ebbed slowly, and the gun in his hand wavered.

"You're insane," he said heavily. "Maybe you don't even realize you changed those seals. Maybe your twisted mind really believes all that silly guff about . . . some old Dutchman who . . ."

His shoulders slumped all at once. He swayed, passing one hand over his bleary

eyes. The gun in his other hand clattered to the floor. Suddenly he snatched the monkey spoon and flung it down the furnace grating.

"Insane," he mumbled. "I . . . I can't shoot a crazy, crippled old man in cold blood! But . . . Oh, why did you do it?" he groaned, staring at the hunchback. "Why, Mr. Sproull? *Why?* My best friend, and then my fiancee? I'd gladly have signed over my whole bank account to you, if it was money you . . .!"

"Oh, *please!*" the antique dealer cried out in despair. "You *must* believe that I had no part in . . . I tried to phone you, to warn you! Tried to figure out the *manner* of death, so you could avoid . . . But they all died so differently! Mrs. Haversham, asphyxiated. Your friend, drowned. And your lovely fiancee . . ." The old man's eyes widened suddenly. "Ah! Now I understand! It's true! It all ties together . . . *Listen to me!*"

Bob Milam had turned unsteadily toward the door, but Mr. Sproull sidled after him like a small persistent crab and seized him by the arm.

"No, no! Wait! You must listen!" he gasped. "The diary mentioned that Schuyler Van Grooten was subject to 'sleeping fits'—a cataleptic. His intimate friends and relatives must have known that, but . . . but they . . . *wait!*" he begged. "*Your monkey spoon, where is it? You must give it away! At once!*" the old dealer insisted excitedly. "To . . . to some impersonal agency. The Scrap-metal Drive—yes, that's it! Get it out of your possession, or you, too, will . . . ! So much hate, such hunger for revenge hovers about them! Like a piece of metal that has been magnetized, they can actually draw disaster to anyone who . . ."

But at that moment the blond young man jerked his arm loose and plunged out into the street, wanting only to get away from this crazy old man who had caused him so much grief in the space of a few short days. Mr. Sproull pattered after him, calling excitedly for him to wait. But by the time he reached the curb, Bob Milam had whistled down a passing cab and was climbing into it. The old hunchback hurried to the curb and strained to catch the address. But the young man was only telling the driver, wearily:

"Drive around. Just drive. Anywhere . . . I don't care."

The antique dealer's arms dropped to his sides limply in defeat. He watched the taxi speed out of sight, then turned slowly and walked slowly, thoughtfully, back into his shop.

THE evening paper, left under his door as usual, carried the story. A taxi was ambling along 187th Street, where wreckers were busy razing an old warehouse. Somehow the dynamite charge went off sooner than was intended . . . and a crumbling wall of bricks and mortar fell on the cab as it passed. The cabby managed to dig his way out. But the single passenger, an intoxicated young man identified as one Robert Milam of New Jersey, could not be pulled out of the wreckage for almost an hour. He was dead when frantic workmen did finally reach him—not crushed, but trapped without air in the rear seat of the taxi cab . . .

And in his pocket the police found a peculiar-looking spoon, inscribed with his name, the date of his birth—and the very date of his death!

Mr. Sproull finished reading, then took off his square-lensed glasses and polished them with a hand that trembled. There was nothing, he mused philosophically, really nothing at all that he could have done to save those three nice young people, who had all three died the same way—fighting for breath; smothered to death by one agency or another. Just exactly as Mrs. Haversham had died, in her exhaust-filled garage.

And just as, centuries ago, an old Dutch patroon, one Schuyler Van Grooten, had died—clawing and screaming and gasping for breath in his coffin, awakened from one of his cataleptic trances to find that his greedy heirs had deliberately buried him alive . . .

The Last Three Ships

BY

MARGARET ST. CLAIR



Heading by Jon Arfstrom

THE best of it was that it wasn't really stealing. Everybody knew that the ships had been moored in the estuary because mooring them was cheaper than cutting them up for scrap would have been. There was a guard and a

"....Them last three hulls, they're funny at night!"

patrol at night, of course, but both were perfunctory and negligent. Evading them was so easy that it was no wonder Pickard thought of his thefts as a sort of praiseworthy salvaging.

Night after night he scrabbled in the bowels of the rotting Liberty ships and came up with sheets of metal, parts of instruments, and lengths of brass and copper pipe. He had a friend in the boat-building business who bought most of what he appropriated, and at prices which were only a shade below normal. Now and then Pickard had moments of uneasiness—fifteen or so deserted ships at night give an eerie, graveyard effect—but he always dismissed the moments as due to imagination and nerves. The ships were just ships, and there wasn't anything to worry about, provided you had sense enough to stay away from the last three hulls. Pickard had worked on these one night, and he wasn't so sure they *were* just ships.

Business was good. After the first month he hired a helper, a tall, gangling youth named Gene, whom he duly warned to avoid the last three ships. Gene took over with no difficulty at all Pickard's belief that his occupation was legitimate salvage, not theft, and he suggested a number of worthwhile improvements in the salvaging technique. When they were put into practice, Pick's receipts increased by nearly forty percent.

Pickard shared the excess fifty-fifty with Gene, and for two months all went well. Pick's wife got the Persian lamb greatcoat she had been talking about and made two payments on it. Pickard liked the way it looked on her. Then Bert, Pickard's friend in the boat-building business, began to complain that the salvage they were bringing in didn't amount to much.

Pick and Gene had a conference. Gene suggested they see what they could get from the last three ships, which were untouched, but Pickard vetoed the idea emphatically. They decided they might be able to make up for the lack of quality in their salvage by increasing its quantity. They worked like beavers all week, and Pick's motorboat had to make two trips to get all the stuff to Bert. But when Bert saw it, he shook his head; they got five dollars less than they had last time.

An argument started on the way back from Bert's shop. Gene didn't see any reason why they shouldn't salvage on the last three hulls, and said so repeatedly. Pick opposed him, formally at first and then with increasing bitterness. It irked him to be forced by his conscience to oppose Gene's doing something that he wished he would do. "All right, then," Pickard said at last. "Try it yourself t'morra night. Don't say I didn't warn you. Stay there a coupla hours. See how you like working around on them last three ships."

Gene pushed his felt skullcap to a defiant angle. "O. K., pop, O. K." He knew Pickard detested being called pop. "You can just bet I will."

IT WAS getting along toward daylight before Gene came back to where they had moored the motorboat. Pick waited for him anxiously, chipping at his fingernails. He ought to've known better than to let a dumb kid like that go on them last three ships. But when Gene came back every pocket was crammed with loot and he was staggering under the weight of a gunny sack he had slung over his shoulder. He showed the stuff to Pick, and Pick had to admit that it was good.

"How was it?" Pickard asked after a minute. "I mean, how was it on them ships?"

"Oh, nice," Gene answered. There was an odd, almost dreamy note in his voice. "Lots of stuff. I didn't like it at first. But after I got used to it, it was nice."

"But—" Pickard checked himself and peered as closely at Gene as he could in the still faint light. As far as he could see, the kid was smiling. Maybe Pickard had been a dope. That one night he'd tried to work on them hulls—there couldn't have been anything following him. Gene was a smart boy, and he seemed to like it on the hulls.

Gene came back the next night with an even better load, but the night after that

he didn't come back at all. Pickard waited for him as long as he dared and then, though it was asking for trouble with the patrol, made a hurried, nervous search of the last three ships. What could have happened to the kid? Pick would have heard the noise if the patrol had got him. Had he fallen and hurt himself?

Pick's search, though hasty, was thorough. No Gene. Only, on the last hull, he found the boy's felt skullcap floating brim up in a sheet of filthy bilge.

Pickard was so upset he couldn't sleep when he got bome. He got up at noon and sat around morosely with his hands between his knees. Estelle noticed his worry and kept at him until he told her about it. At the end of his account, she laughed.

"He was a jerk, Pick," she said comfortingly. "What happened was he got scared and ran and then was ashamed to come back and tell you about it afterwards."

"Yeh. But what scared him?" Pickard swallowed. "I remember hearing," he said with some difficulty, "about how there was a welder got welded up in one of those ships when they was building them. They launched the ship with him in it. And then there was a man down in the double bottom and his air hose caught fire. And all like that. Maybe I ought to look for a private job. Them last three hulls—they're funny at night."

Estelle snorted. "That's a lotta horsehair, Pick, and you know it. I sure never thought you'd be chicken. There ain't nothing there. But if you don't like them last three ships, don't go on them. Get yourself another helper, and have him do it."

The new helper quit about four hours after he had been hired, saying he didn't like night work. Pick didn't argue with him. He paid him his time and then (Estelle's remark about being chicken had stung him) went on the last hull by himself.

He stayed there less than an hour. He was a good deal more sensitive than Gene had been. What drove him away was nothing visible, but an emotion so complex as to be quite beyond his powers of analysis.

He felt tired and a little feverish when he got home, as if he was coming down with something. He must have taken cold or something on the ship. He had supper with Estelle and then went to bed. It was about eleven a.m. when he had his dream.

IT STARTED out mildly enough. He was hunting through one of the last three hulls for a highly saleable chunk of everdur he knew was somewhere about. As he hunted he began to have a feeling, faint and then stronger, that something pretty unpleasant was lurking on the edge of his vision. Two or three times he turned around abruptly, hoping to surprise it, but it moved faster than he could.

He kept on looking for the everdur, up and down ladders and in the crew's quarters and the engine room. At last, in the bilge of number two hold, he saw the half-submerged chunk of metal.

As soon as he saw it, he forgot he had been hunting it. By the strange equivalence of dreams, it was the bilge, the filthy stinking bilge, which became the object of his desire. He knelt down beside it, scooped it up in his hand, sick with disgust and self-loathing, began to drink.

Pick's heart was beating violently when he woke. Of all the dumb dreams! What did a thing like that mean? His heart was still pounding abnormally when the noon whistle blew. But after a while, lying with his head resting on his arms, he began to smile unconsciously.

He got up around three and read the paper while Estelle used the vacuum on the Venetian blinds. She kept looking at him and frowning while she worked. As they were eating, she said. "You going on them three ships tonight, Pick?"

"Yeah."

"I—" Estelle ran her tongue over her clotted lipstick. "Don't do it, Pick."

"Why not?" Pickard answered. His face wore a dim remote smile. "You said yourself there wasn't nothing there."

"Yeah, I know. But—" Estelle worked a patch of polish loose from one fingernail—"it's different when it's you, Pick.

You ain't acting like yourself. We can get along somehow, and I don't care about the coat. Please don't go."

Pickard got up and kissed her. He reached for his cap. "Don't worry about it, Es," he said from the door. He gave her a look, bland and composed, which she was to remember afterward. "It's O.K. I ain't scared."

AND the funny part of it was, he wasn't. He never was scared again. He liked it fine on the hulls. Even when Gene came up behind him two nights later in the hold of the *M. S. Trajan* and pawed at him with his rotting hands, Pick wasn't scared. He screamed and screamed, of course, and tried to fight Gene off, but that was more or less a reflex action. Part of him, deep inside, was delighted.

This was a good thing, because it would not have helped him to be scared. He hit Gene over and over again, but he couldn't hurt Gene; Gene was already dead. And then Pick was floundering around in the bilge—the sickening stinking loathesome wonderful bilge—and screaming automatically, while Gene stood over him making soft blubbering noises with his oozing lips. The other one came forward from where he had been lurking and proceeded with what he had to do. He didn't stop until Pickard was one of them permanently.

Estelle never did finish the payments on her fur coat. After a considerable interval of mourning she set up housekeeping with a man named Saddler, who had long admired her. The ships went back to their slow job of rusting at their moorings without bothering the taxpayers. And nowadays, if one is so indiscreet as to go poking at night among the decaying hulls as they roll quietly at anchor in the estuary, he will find that the last three are populated by a small, happily-rotting company, a company consisting of Pickard, Gene, and the welder, who has the honorable position of Oldest Inhabitant.



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At the End of the Corridor

Heading by John Giunta



"Some day you may rob one grave too many."

BY
EVANGELINE WALTON

WHENEVER Philip Martin felt like being funny he would say that he was a professional grave-robber. If people looked properly shocked

he would add, "I began with a king's grave," and then grin. A mild joke, not in the best of taste perhaps, but then everything about Philip was mild; his nearsighted brown eyes, his tall, shambling frame, his face that never had been quite young. Even his shy way of showing off, of hoping, a little wistfully, that he could shock people or make them laugh.

As a matter of fact, His Majesty the King had been dead about 3,000 years when Philip and his father, the late and distinguished James K. Martin, Ph.D., had dug him up. It is generally considered respectable to rob a man's grave if he has been dead long enough. The Martins, father and son, had always made a most correct and respectable thing of grave-robbing, just as they had of everything else they turned their well-kept, somewhat dry Bostonian hands to. That anything could ever change this (or indeed his own prim, proper personal life) Philip never dreamed when he set out for Greece to carry on the work of the late Dr. Kimon Dragoumis. He was contemptuously amused when, at a farewell dinner, a slightly tipsy Parisian savaot said to him:

"Some day you may rob one grave too many, my friend."

Philip grinned. "You mean curses? That old tripe about ancient tombs having invisible guardians?"

M. de Lesseps smiled. "You think me a foolish old man, *hein?* Not all ancient things are toothless. Yet you may be wise, my young friend. Perhaps it is safer to rob the tombs of the ancient dead, of those who have had time to forget their wrongs. When I was young I too went to Greece, to Maina where the old blood is purest, to write a book. But I saw what I dared not write. There are dead there who need no curses—they can *act*!" He shuddered and crossed himself.

Philip said indulgently, "If dead men could walk because they had reason for revenge, a lot of them would have done it these last few years. The men who died in concentration camps, for instance."

The savant said seriously, "That depends on the man, my friend. On what he studied while he was alive, what he knew and believed. On what his background was. Among simple yet ancient peoples, who are still near the source of things, there are survivals—" He rambled on, learnedly yet drunkenly, about primeval man, about vision and gifts that his modern descendants had lost. Until Philip got very bored, and took too many drinks.

He had a headache next morning, when he boarded the plane for Athens. But it was only the beginning of his headaches. For when he reached the little seaside village that had been the site of Dragoumis' work he found—nothing. Only the few *tholoi* that the great Greek had first found and explored were still visible. The bulk of that underground collection of mysterious Mycenean tomb-chambers had vanished as if the hills out of whose sides they had been carved had swallowed them up again.

It seemed strange, in spite of the disaster that had come upon Dr. Dragoumis and his co-workers; the guerrilla warfare that had raged for years afterward through this grim land of sea and mountains, and was still uncomfortably near. So near, in fact, that it had taken Philip years to get his own permit to dig.

A landslide had covered the excavations; that was all he could learn. Though some of the villagers must have known the approximate location of the buried sites they would tell him nothing. They acted either sullen or blandly igoorant—too ignorant. He had a queer and unreasonable feeling that they were afraid.

Sophoulis, the local school-teacher, advised him to go to Mme. Dragoumis, "She may still have some of her husband's papers, kyrie."

"You mean she still lives here?" Philip asked in surprise. He had heard of Mme. Dragoumis as one of the famous beauties of the Balkans, a very gay and fashionable woman, much younger than her husband. "In that island villa of theirs?"

"She will not leave it, kyrie. Not for an hour. Not once since that night the doctor died has she set foot on the mainland. She says that her husband is still alive—that she must be there to greet him if he returns."

"She dares not leave it," Mrs. Sophoulis said with a hard little smile. "Her family has been worried about her, and once they even sent doctors to take her away, but she locked herself in her room and said she would kill herself if they broke the doors down—that it would be better to die that way than to go ashore."

Philip felt a little apprehensive. The lady might not be sane enough to be of any help to him.

"I thought the Nazis shot Dr. Dragoumis," he said.

"So it is said. None knows," Sophoulis said heavily. "They suspected him of hiding arms, arms smuggled in from British submarines; and perhaps he was. Or perhaps he had found tombs in which there were precious things—treasures that he feared the Nazis might carry off to Germany. Certainly he was doing something that he wished to keep secret. He was a giant who could outdig any of his men, and toward the last he dug oftenest by moonlight—and alone."

"It must have been the tombs themselves that he wished to protect," Philip said stiffly. "No true scientist would risk such monuments of the past by storing arms in them."

"Who knows, kyrie? A true patriot will risk anything. At least there was talk. Too much talk. Perhaps even someone who wished to talk too much. So the Nazis waited for him, that night at the villa. Kyria Dragoumis says that they shot him as he was escaping through the French windows, but that so great was his strength that he ran on, with their bullets in him. And later, when they searched the *tholoi* where they thought he might be hiding, the mountain itself slid forward and covered them—yes, the very mountains seemed angry that the invaders should dare go poking about among their bowels. It took them two days to dig out the bodies of their Gestapo men, kyrie."

MRS. SOPHOULIS cut in excitedly, her dark eyes bright, "But they never found the doctor, kyrie! And some of our people say that they have seen him since, by moonlight, pacing the cliffs above the sea, and looking out toward his home across the waters."

Her husband laughed a little uneasily. "Our peasants hereabouts are still very superstitious, kyrie. They can see anything."

"So it seems," said Philip dryly. "You think that Mme. Dragoumis might be able to help me then?"

"She would not!" Mrs. Sophoulis snorted. "She never knew anything about it; she took no interest in it. Or in anything but parties and young men. She stays on the island now only because she is afraid—not for love of her dear dead husband, poof! Keep away from her, kyrie; she is bad luck, that one."

Sophoulis' fist pounded the table. "Be still, woman! None has any right to speak against Kyria Dragoumis; I have told you that I will have no idiotic women's gossip in my house."

There was evidently some local feeling against Mme. Dragoumis, Philip thought as he left. Possibly only among the women; Sophoulis was clearly either too fair-minded or too cautious to lend himself to it. Yet what fear could they possible think kept Mme. Dragoumis on the island—surely government guards could have kept her safe from any guerrilla ambush? The whole business was a puzzle. Why should Dragoumis have been fool enough, that night, to attempt escape? He could not have hidden anything incriminating in the tombs. "Attempted escape" was an age-old, trite pretext to cover murder; but why should anybody have wanted to murder Dragoumis, a scientist who had surely had too much sense to take any interest in anything but his work?

Well, it was none of his business. What concerned him was to find a way into those lost Mycenean vaults without blasting holes in their sides while he was at it. He took a boat and had himself rowed out to the island. To the little landing-stage from which broad steps led up to a white villa above the sea; a villa set like a pearl upon a terrace made green and silver by the foliage of orange and olive trees.

Or so he thought until he saw Anthi

Dragoumis and knew the difference between pearl and setting. Between life and mere existence.

She was a beauty. She was delight, and wonder, and youth—the youth that Philip had never had. She set fire to the dry man as flame fires tinder.

And she was gracious to him, she was kind. Yes, she still had some of her husband's papers, she would show them to him, and search for more. He could help her search if he liked. He did. He went again and again to that villa on the island. He filled his eyes and ears with her; with the soft music of her voice, with the curves of her body, that made softer music whenever she moved. With the warm red of her lips, and the depths of her shining eyes.

And then one day she let him fill his arms . . .

He tried, after that, to get her to marry him and go away with him. "Your husband is dead, Anthi. He has been dead these five years. It cannot hurt you to accept that now. You do not love him any more."

But she shook her head. "He was not too badly hurt that night; he rowed himself back to the mainland. He was a peasant, born in a hut in Maina—not civilized, like you and me, for all his learning. He was very strong, Philip; strong like the men of an earlier world. It would be hard for him to die."

JEALOUSY leapt in him. So that was it—Dragoumis' brute strength had dazzled her, his hard peasant heritage! That was what she liked in a man. He said roughly, "If he's alive, why hasn't he come back to you? What could he have been afraid of, after the Nazis left? Afraid enough to make him stay away from a wife like you?" He kissed her, hard and savagely. He strained her close, trying to hurt her, to prove that he too was strong.

She laughed up into his face and stroked his cheek. "You would not stay away from me, would you, my Philip? Don't worry; I love you more than I ever loved him. You are much younger than he was. Though he loved me very much; as much as you could ever do."

"Then why would he stay away from you?" Philip muttered.

She looked up at him very seriously then, her eyes gone grave. "Because, that last night, he accused me of betraying him to the Nazis. Because the officer who came to arrest him was young and very handsome—a man I had danced with several times in Athens." She shivered. "But he was not handsome when they dug him out from under the mountain, after he had tried to follow my husband into the ancient tombs."

Philip stared at her in horror. "You don't mean that Dragoumis did have explosives in there and deliberately set them off—that he'd have destroyed *tholoi* just to kill a few men?"

She laughed. "Not a few men, no. One man—the man he thonght had taken me from him. You would not do that, would you, my archaeologist, my ruin-lover? After all, it was Kimon, my poor, aging Kimon, who loved me best."

Suspicion stabbed him suddenly, like a knife twisting in his flesh. He shook her. "Did you love the German then, Anthi? He was younger than your husband, too—and so handsome!"

But that insulted her. She stormed at him, she raged and wept until he practically had to go down on his knees and apologize to her. Until suspicion faded, became a shameful outrage that he dared not even remember.

When she was quiet again he tried once more to persuade her that her husband must be dead. "No living man could have stayed away from you so long. Whatever he was fool or mad enough to believe for the moment he could not—you are so beautiful, Anthi!" But she only wept again and shivered.

"You did not know Kimon, my Philip. I did." She peered nervously over her shoulder, at the shadows that seemed to have grown, blacker, over the bed. "He was so strong, Philip. He was like the giant who could not die so long as he could touch his mother, the earth. Nothing could ever kill him completely, here in his own hills. I think that he is still waiting somewhere, inside the mountain, in his *tholoi*—waiting,

watching for me. That is why I never dare set foot on the mainland. Why I never can unless he is found—and laid."

Philip stared at her blankly. "But even if he were there, Anthi—a madman, in hiding, getting food somehow—he'd have stolen a boat and come out here long ago. You must see that."

She looked very straight at him then. Her eyes were pits of blackness, blacker than the shadows. Her voice was hushed, almost a whisper: *"There are those who cannot cross water."*

For a minute he did not understand. Then his face went whiter than hers. With an incredulous, yet comprehending horror. For now at last he knew. Evil things could not cross water—the unalive yet undead could not, the terrible *vrykolakes* of Greek belief.

All these years she had been lying, all these years she had believed her husband dead! A man no longer, but a thing of supernatural evil, an avenger who was seeking her.

Why? *About what else had she lied?*

But she had risen, she was coming toward him. Her eyes held his. Their warm brightness was all around him, and her arms were round his neck.

"You will do that for me, my Philip? You will find him and lay him, so that we can go away together and be married? So that we can forget him and love each other, always?" She pressed her cheek against his. "You will set me free from fear. You will do that for your Anthi, Philip? For me?" Her lips moved along his cheek softly, touched his ear.

He stood quite still in her arms. He said hoarsely, "How could I find him, even if he were there?"

She said softly, almost crooning, "You will find him. You will lay him. For your Anthi. For me."

He did not answer. He stood there horrified, trying to think. In England and in Poland they used to bury the unquiet dead with stakes through their hearts. To keep them down, to keep them from walking. What had been done to such dead men in Greece? He could not remember. Something not so simple as a stake, he thought—something horrible—

She pressed herself closer against him. She whispered, "It will not be so hard. I can tell you where to find the last tomb he found—the greatest, the royal *tholos*, the one he said he kept secret for fear the Nazis would loot it."

"You think he would have gone there, knowing that you knew the place?" Philip laughed harshly.

"He would have, to save what he could. He loved it more than anything, even me. Night after night he used to tell me of it, to describe his precious day's work when I wanted to sleep. But now at last that will be useful. It will help you to find him, and then you will cut off his arms and legs—so that he will have no feet to follow us, no hands to strike us!"

Philip said bitterly, "Do you want to tie them under his armpits, as murderers used to do in Solon's time? Are you mad, Anthi? I am, to listen to you."

She flung back her head, her eyes hard with suspicion. "No, I do not want them tied under his armpits. I want them brought here to me, tonight! There are signs by which I shall know them—do not think that you can deceive me. If I do not get them I will never marry you—you shall never touch me again!"

NIGHT found Philip on the mountainside; high above the lights of the village. He had one man with him, a big fellow with the brawn of an ox and almost as few brains. He came from another village, and if by any unlucky chance he should see Dr. Dragoumis' body he would not recognize it. He had said nothing, only looked scared and crossed himself when Philip had explained the need for this secret digging by night.

"There may be treasures in this tomb, Costa, golden things that it would be risky to let the guerrillas hear of. Though there is probably nothing but pottery and old stones. And perhaps fragments of some old king's body—if it is not well-preserved I may bring them up."

Costa would not be surprised, now, if

he saw pieces of a corpse. Philip gagged at the thought. It would hardly look human now, after so many years in the musty dark. Or would it? Philip did not know. He shuddered. How could Anthi be afraid of such a thing, lying there helpless, horrible in its rottenness and decay; pitiful because of the very hideousness that cancelled its onetime humanity?

She was waiting for him now, below, in a boat about a hundred yards offshore. She had to come so far to show him which particular crag covered the buried entrance to the *dromos*, to that great passageway leading into the mountain's heart. He had expected her to go back after that, but she was still there, her boat a tiny dark speck upon the moonlit waters. Waiting vulture-like, eager for her prey.

She was grimly thorough, he thought. Ancient murderers were supposed to have been satisfied with cutting off their victims' hands and feet, but she could imagine the corpse running after her fleetly on the stumps of footless legs, catching and crushing her in handless arms, in an embrace that would break the bones—

He shuddered again, mopped his forehead. Easy for a man to have fancies here, amid all this bleak wilderness of rock.

"What is it? Are you tired, kyrie?" asked Costa hopefully. "We have been digging almost four hours now. You could go down to the boat, to the lady. Did she bring wine for us, kyrie?"

Philip hesitated. He was tired, and the light was very bad. He had expected the moon to be bright tonight, to make the mountain almost as light as day. But instead, though it shone clear and bright upon the sea, some trick of cloud-shadows cut it off from the slopes, shrouded them in pitch. He and Costa had to work by lantern-light, and they kept the lantern muffled, for fear it might be seen from the village below. The shadows all around them were dancing, dancing, like immense black cats playing with two trapped mice.

What if he were to assert himself, to go down to Anthi and tell her that he would do her work another night, when the light was better—?

But then she would laugh at his weakness. And she would be right. Was it not weakness?

He answered Costa's proposition shortly: "No." He set his teeth and plunged his spade into the earth. Hard, with renewed vigor. And suddenly the spade struck hollowness; sank into the earth as if hands had reached up from below and seized it. A dislodged pebble went rattling on down inside the hole, down, down, into gulf-like space.

Costa crossed himself again and gasped, "May the Panagia—may the Virgin and all the blessed saints preserve us!"

Earth and massive stones fell together with a great thud. A pit opened, almost beneath their feet. The Greek cried out and jumped back. But Philip laughed. His eyes were shining. He forgot Anthi; he forgot Dragoumis. This was what he had come to Greece to find; the discovery he had dreamed for years of making; this was triumph and fulfilment!

He dug feverishly; he urged Costa on with both praise and curses. Until the hole lay like a wide-open mouth at their feet, a mouth blacker, more thickly solid, than the blackness of the night.

Philip tied a rope to the lantern. He lowered it into the pit and leaned over, watching course after course of great stone blocks appear and disappear as its golden eye sank deeper, farther into the dark. At last it came to rest upon a rock floor many feet below, making a tiny brilliant island there.

Philip took an axe, a flashlight, and some cloths, set another rope around his waist and prepared to follow the lantern.

"Wait here, Costa. When I jerk the rope raise me."

He wondered fleetingly why he had said that. Surely it would have been simpler to say that he would shout up from the depths? Then he forgot it as he swung dowward into space.

HE LOOKED about him eagerly as he landed. To his right, within a few feet of his descent, the passageway was blocked by rough masses of earth and rock.

Probably these covered the real entrance to the *dromos*, that which had been hidden for tens of centuries until Dragoumis pierced its age-old seals; on that fatal night it must have been crushed by the landslide that had buried his pursuers. But to the left the passage stretched on, seemingly endless, into the mountain's heart. For a little way only the lantern's light pierced it, breaking the darkness into pieces, into dancing shadows.

Did one of those shadows dart back as he looked, one a little thicker, a little blacker, than its fellows?

He did not heed it. His heart felt light, exultant, as he levelled his flashlight and walked on, toward the blackness that looked solid as a wall. He no longer even felt horror of the axe beneath his arm. If Dragoumis could have chosen, surely he would have had his dead body dismembered a thousand times rather than let his great discovery be lost again, hidden from mankind, perhaps for more centuries. For on no other terms would Anthi ever have disclosed the secret. Poor girl! Later, when her hysterical, superstitious obsession was over, she would regret this, she would be kind and gentle and fastidious again, as a woman should be. Now he must do whatever was necessary to bring her peace.

He went on into the shadows, and they retreated before him slowly, steadily. He followed them down that stone corridor that led through the earth's bowels.

Once or twice it seemed to him that he heard a faint curious rustling among those dark, wavering shapes that recoiled before his flashlight. As if someone were walking ahead of him, stealthily. He decided that it must be some trick of echoes, reverberating oddly in that subterranean place. It could not be bats, for there was never anything where the light came; throw his flashligbt where he would, its heams found only great, bare blocks of stone.

Then he came at last to the black rectangle of the inner portal, the opening into that great, circular chamber Anthi had told him of. There Dragoumis had found golden vessels and golden filigree-work, and images of gods that no man had worshipped for ages. There he had found bones, and there, perhaps, he had left his own.

And there, at last, fear took Philip. It closed round his throat like an icy hand. In his inner ears a far-off voice seemed to cry: "*Do not disturb the dead! Do not disturb the dead!*"

He shrugged. That voice came out of his childhood, out of superstitions and conventional moralities engraved upon the young mind as a phonograph record is engraved upon wax. He thought, "I am being foolish as Anthi. I have handled many mummies, I have felt their dry, withered flesh slough off my hands. What difference is there, what real difference? A man can be as dead in three minutes as be will be in three thousand years."

He swung the flashlight forward, toward the inner chamber.

He saw the gleam of gold, he saw strange, grotesque shapes of stone. He saw carved stone *larnaki*, and, in the far corner, a tahle of red marble. Its legs gleamed under the light, like blood.

Was there something on top of the table, among the shadows? Something long and dark and still, like the outstretched form of a man?

Once again fear took him. He could not bear to throw the flashlight upon the table-top, to see. He edged slowly into the chamber, moving cautiously, laboriously, as if through invisible barriers. There were no more echoes. In the deathly silence he heard nothing but the fierce, hard pounding of his heart.

Suddenly he stopped. He could not hear to go farther, to come within touching distance of that thing that might be lying there.

He set his teeth and his will. Slowly, as if it were a rock too heavy for him to move, the flashlight came up. Its beams touched something; something upon the table-top.

A man's hand that lay, lax and brown and leathery, upon red marble. A large hand, larger than most men's. Firm and sleek as leather it looked; and yet, in some curious and subtle way, as lifeless. None could have mistaken it for the hand of a living man. Philip's brain reeled; through it

ran dizzily words he had heard among the Greek peasants and never heeded; the bodies of the walking dead—of those whom the earth had not loosed—were incorruptible; undecaying!

And as he looked the hand changed. The fingers tensed, the long tendons on the back of it rose and stiffened, as if that dark recumbent form were bracing itself to rise!

With a strangled cry of horror Philip hurled himself forward, the axe gleaming above his head.

COSTA shivered. The night wind was cold, and once a cry had seemed to drift up from the depths below. He had listened closely after that, but he had not been able to tell whether the cry was repeated, whether a faint horrible screaming, muffled by distance, had come up from the earth.

The rope at his feet jerked suddenly, convulsively, like a great snake. He cried out and jumped back, then remembered and gasped with relief.

The signal!

Gladly he hauled his master up. "The saints be thanked, kyrie! You are safe! I thought I heard something—"

The tall man did not answer. He turned and strode off down the mountainside, with long, swift strides. "He goes very fast," Costa thought, "as if there were something before—or behind him—for which he could not bear to wait. He does not even stop to give me any of the bundles he carries." He followed with the lantern, looking curiously at those bundles. They were long and narrow, they looked like human arms and legs. When he saw a limp hand dangling from one of them he crossed himself.

"The old king must have come all to pieces. Who would have thought he would still have looked so human?"

He gained a little on his master. The lantern rays fell on those packages, and Costa's eyes grew large and round. After that he walked more slowly, and let the distance widen between himself and the tall figure ahead. For through the cloth wrappings something dark was seeping, something that stained the white linen.

He dropped farther behind, when they came within sight of the shore and his master spurted suddenly, running out with daemonic speed onto the white sands. The clouds had left the moon; the beach was almost as bright as day.

A cry came from the boat. The waiting woman tugged at the oars and swung it in, closer. She leaped out upon the sands. Her voice pealed out, a song of gladness:

"You have them, Philip! You have them—"

She ran forward, her arms outstretched, her face bright with triumph. The man waited for her. He had stopped and stood very still; he made no move, either to meet or welcome her. And when she reached him she did not even look at him. She only clutched, with hands as terribly eager as her eyes, at those packages he carried.

Silently, he let her take them. Silently, he stood over her as she unwrapped them. As their ugly, stained contents fell from her paralyzed hands to the earth—

And then she screamed. Terribly and horribly she screamed. For the first time she looked up into his face, and saw it. He took off his hat, Philip Martin's hat, and moved toward her, and in that clear moonlight, for all the distance, Costa saw that his head was not Philip Martin's head.

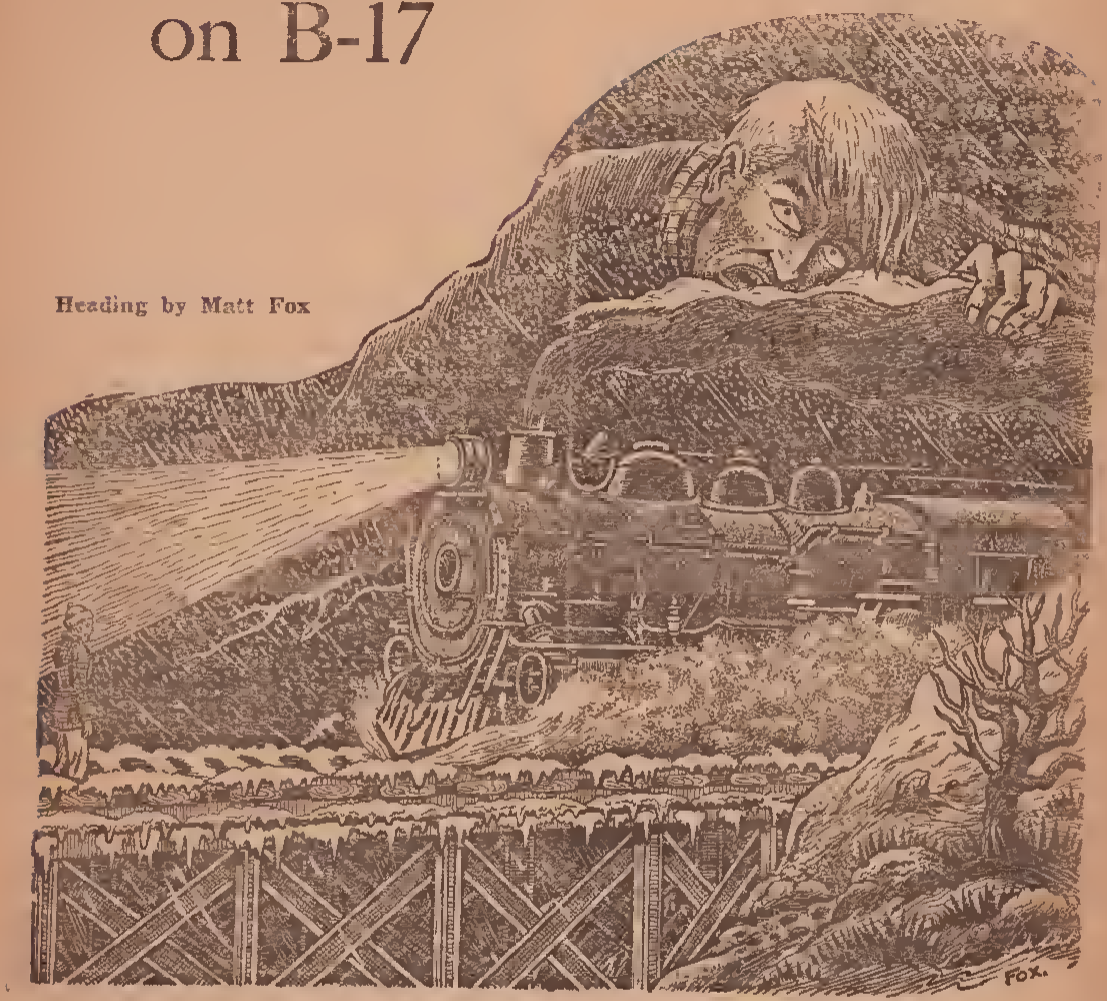
After that Costa's eyes closed and he knelt and prayed. He did not see what made the lady scream again. Her cries kept on for quite a long time, but at last the beach was silent. There was no sound on it, even the sound of a retreating footstep. And then, and only then, did Costa find the strength to run away.

Later, the Athenian newspapers carried feature headlines: FRESH GUERRILLA OUTRAGES! MUTILATED BODY OF AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGIST FOUND IN MYCENEAN TOMB! On a nearby beach had been found the bodies of Kyria Anthi Dragoumis and of a man who must have been one of the guerrilla murderers. A giant of a man, whose body, unaccountably, crumbled and fell apart when it was touched.

The Man on B-17

BY

STEPHEN GRENDON



Heading by Matt Fox

O. K., I'll go over it again from the beginning.

The way it happened was like this. I was bringing Number Twelve down toward Hungerford; you highball from Rexford's Crossing—that's about thirty miles back—but you have to wheel in toward B-Seventeen sort of easy on account of that curve there. The trestle is on a curve, and the gorge below, with the river running deep and swift there. That night. . . .

No, that wasn't the night it happened. I'm telling you this because it began after that—quite a while. This was a night in the beginning of winter—maybe three months ago. Late November. Snow falling. Yes, the first night of snow. O. K.—then it was the eighteenth. I don't fix the date, but if you say that was the first night of snow, then that was it.

Night after night he just walked the trestle—which in itself was certain death.

Well, that night I wheeled around toward B-Seventeen, and I saw this fella standing there. I thought it was Bart Hinch. Bart had a shack this side of the trestle: he walked it out of Hungerford regular about that time of night. But this guy wasn't Bart, he was a slim guy, not Bart's build at all, and he was just standing there on the trestle—along about the middle. The headlight caught him, and I hit the whistle hard. I couldn't stop, and I didn't see how he was going to get out in time. But he did it somehow. Never hit a thing, just went on smooth as you please. And there at the other end, I could have sworn I saw a woman, just standing there, waiting—probably for that guy on B-Seventeen.

Well, sir, that was the beginning.

After that, I saw him again. I saw him fairly regular. And one night coming down toward town, I was wheeling it extra-slow—oh, that was around Christmas; we'd had a deep snow, and it was blowing some, white gusts of snow over the trestle, and I thought I'd better take her slow around the curve; that's a tricky one—and there he was again, but closer to the end of the trestle; so I leaned out of the cab and I hollered at him.

"Light-footed?" I yelled at him.

He looked at me. I thought he smiled.

No, I couldn't be sure. The snow was blowing, and there he was standing beside the track at the bank—not two feet from the trestle and I said to Carroll—he was in the cab with me that night—I said, "That guy's looking for trouble," I said, "and if he keeps up that way, he'll find it. Head on."

Carroll can tell you. Carroll said, "Who is he?" and I said, "Hanged if I know!"

VERY next night we saw him again, Carroll and me both. This time he was square in the middle of the trestle, and I swear before God I thought we were going to hit him. I said to Carroll, "We're going to hit him!" I said, and I was bearing down on that whistle for all she had. He was there in the middle of the bridge, and the snow falling all around him. I didn't see him till just before we hit him.

We started slowing down at the other end of the trestle. No, I didn't feel a thing. Most of the time you can tell. I didn't know what to do, but then I figured it wasn't much use stopping; the snow was that thick you couldn't see anything anyway, and if we knocked him off the trestle, why, he'd be way down somewhere in the gorge, maybe swept along in the water, God knows where. There was no use in it; we could report it in Hungerford.

No, I didn't report it. Reason was when we stopped at Hungerford, Mr. Kenyon, the conductor, came up alongside from the last coach. "You see that fellow on B-Seventeen?" he asked. I started to explain that I couldn't stop, and then I began to wonder how *he'd* seen him. I said, yes, I'd seen him, and with this and that, it came out he saw him *after* we passed over the trestle. Saw the woman, too. She was on the other side that night. Carroll's side, but Carroll wasn't looking that way. I don't know how he did it. Light-footed is hardly the word. That bridge is narrow—narrower'n most. About the only way he could do it is to hang down off the side, and I don't know how he could do it that way at night, what with the snow and the ice underneath. Be bound to slip off and go right down. But Mr. Kenyon saw him right smack in the middle of the trestle; he must have bounced right back up from wherever he went.

"What was he doing?" I asked.

"Looked to be waiting for somebody," said Mr. Kenyon.

Well, that was the way I took it from the first. Maybe the woman. But then, the woman seemed to be waiting for someone, too. It didn't figure out right; it didn't add up. After that, I wasn't quite so nervous when I saw him again.

Sure, I saw him again. About a week later, that was. He was walking the trestle. Just walking. I saw him sort of rise up just behind the marker for the bridge, they're all numbered the way they should be and the last bridge before Hungerford is that one—B-Seventeen. He rose up and he started walking toward town. If I hadn't known better I'd have sworn that he climbed up out of the gorge along the wall there.

No, he couldn't have done it. Wall's almost sheer on that side for twenty feet or so down before it gets craggy enough to climb. Ain't a man alive could do it on a night like that one, a winter night with snow and ice. It was like glass along the side of the gorge, and I don't see that there was any way it could be done. But as I said, there he was. I turned to Carroll and I said, "There he is again."

"Damn his eyes!" said Carroll. "Old Twelve's going to get him one of these nights."

Those were bis very words. I couldn't argue with him about that. I figured then it was just a matter of time before we hit him. I didn't care how good he was at ducking out of the way. I've seen 'em beat that game so long, and then they get caugbt. A train highballing along that way ain't something anybody in his right mind's going to take and fight. You can tell by the feeling you get in one of those steam-wagons, in your hands and all through you when you're pushing ber down—and Number Twelve's no hay-burner, no, nor no tramp, eitber; Number Twelve's an old girl you can count on, a real battleship—aod you get the feeling she wouldn't like it when a guy keeps daring her, and sooner or later she'd take him.

Well, it was the same that night. Saw him on the trestle, and then somehow he was on the other side; be must have run pretty fast. I opened the window and leaned out and hollered at him.

"Don't you believe in signs?" I bollered, meaning he should take notice where it says at both ends of B-Seventeen that trespassing is forbidden and so on. He didn't pay me no more attention than as if I d been the wind. But that time I saw his face. Young fellow. Not like Bart at all. Had on a tassel-cap and a mackinaw. Looked fair—light-haired. Couldn't have weighed more'n a hundred seventy-five. O. K., I thought, I'll turn you in.

SO I DID. I waited till we hit Elroy and gave his description to the cinder-bull there, and the cinder-bull went out—it was clear that night, with a moon showing, and not cold; he went out right away. Number Twelve's the night owl through Hungerford and Elroy. He went out that night and the next night and the next. That guy was o' the trestle every night. But the cinder-bull didn't see hide nor hair of him. Of the woman, either. And be was there at least two out of those three times. Because Carroll saw her once, and I saw her the secood time, and we probably just missed her the other time. She was probably there, all right, just like the other times. So the cinder-bull gave up. He wouldn't argue. "I'm the Casey Jones," I said, "and Carroll's an old rawhider, and tbe ticket snatcher, Mr. Kenyon—all three of us saw him," I said. But I might as well have talked to the wind. So I ran in my report to the Super aod let it go at that.

We kept on seeing him and the woman, sometimes regular, sometimes after a week or so when we didn't see either one. It went that way all through the winter. It went on that way untd that night early this month, first week in March, when it happened—and since then neither of us has seen a thing, not a solitary thing.

Well, just like I said before, we bore down on B-Seventeen that night with the snow blowing thick as smoke all around us. Carroll saw him first—and he let out a yell. "There he is again!" And I looked, and sure enough—there he was, a-kneeling in the middle of the trestle. Kneeling—yes, sir! Right smack in the middle, and I knew we were going to get him, I knew the old girl was going to take and pitch bim off into the gorge. I wanted to close my eyes, but I couldn't. And a good thing, maybe, I couldn't.

"Three of 'em!" Carroll hollered out.

Aod sure enough, there was three. That guy in the tassel-cap and the mackinaw was at this end, and the woman was at the other end. The headligbt showed 'em all three just as plain. The guy in the mackinaw was braced, seemed like, to keep anyone coming from the bridge; and the woman on the other end. She looked—well, no, I wouldn't say *mean,* just *grim*—and he looked *terrible,* like as if he was angry and cold and set to kill. The one in the middle

—that one—well, we saw him before we hit him, and we knew him; that one was Bart Hinch.

WE HIT him. There's no more to say about that. He was there and we couldn't stop, and whatfore in God's name he was kneeling there in the middle of the trestle, praying or whatever it was he was doing, nobody'll ever know. It wasn't our fault; we couldn't throw Number Twelve off the trestle just to save him. So we hit him, and I felt it when the old girl knocked him off into the gorge, and it near made me sick to know we'd done it.

We stopped at Hungerford. That was two miles away, maybe a little better. You could see where we hit him. There was nothing we could do but report it, and let them go back, come daylight, to find what they could.

Sure, I'd talked with Bart Hinch a good many times.

No, never heard him say anything about somebody waiting for him on B-Seventeen. I don't know what he said in his cups in town, and he never said anything to me about hating to walk bome at night. Could be that's how come he didn't go out mucb after dark, but me—I wouldn't know.

No, I never knew Tod Benning. All I know about bim is that he ran off somewhere before he was to marry Lois Malone and that it killed her or she killed herself or something like that. Never heard that Bart owed him money and that he set out to collect it and never came back. Talk's cheap.

What did it look like on the trestle that night? Well, it looked to me as if the fella in the mackinaw was holding down one end of the bridge and the woman was holding down the other so's Bart couldn't get off either way. I don't care how it sounds—you asked me, and I'm telling you. Carroll'll tell you the same thing. That's tbe way it looked. Sure, it was snowing. Sure, I might be mistaken. But the old girl's light cut right through that snow, and I saw those faces—and Bart Hinch's was mortal afraid, and it didn't look like he was seeing Number Twelve, either, but just those two, that fella in the mackinaw and the woman.

No, sir, we hit only once, only one thing. That was Bart Hinch. I saw it. I saw how the old girl just tossed him out of the way, out into the gorge. Then he was gone into the blackness and the snow underneath. I felt it where I sat. So did Carroll. He'll tell you the same. Only once.

HOW do I account for their being two bodies down there? I don't account for it. Bart was killed by Number Twelve. I said that. I saw it happen. The other one, the one you say is Tod Benning, you said yourself was dead a long time, two years or so, maybe more. I've been in Number Twelve seven years, and this is the first time we ever hit a man. Anyway, they say there's no bones broken—and the old girl would have broken him up some. So maybe he fell or was flung off the trestle—I can't say.

Yes, I can identify the man on B-Seventeen if you show him to me. Or his picture. The woman, too. It'll be the same as last time. You put those pictures down in front of me, and it'll be the same.

The man is number five, there, and the woman's number thirteen.

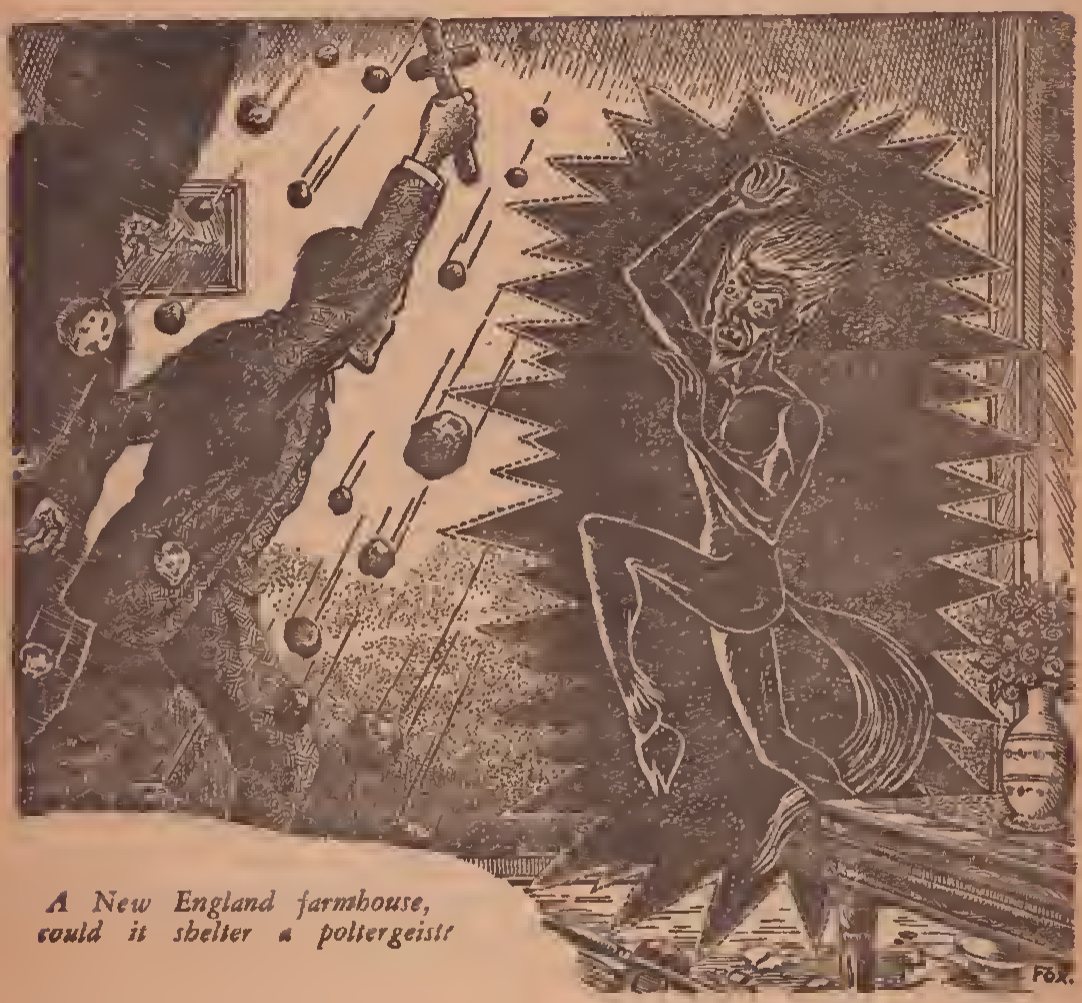
No mistake. At least, *I'm* not making the mistake, and Carroll's not making it. So it must be yours. If the woman's picture is one of Lois Malone—well, the woman on the trestle that nigbt looked enough like her to be her twin sister, even if she never had one. But you don't fool me on that man, number five there. I saw him as plain as I see you, more than once. That's the man. And if you say that's a picture of Tod Benning, then that body you drug up out of the river isn't Tod Benning's no matter what the doctor and the dentist have to say, because that's the man Carroll and Mr. Kenyon and I saw on B-Seventeen.

That's the way it happened. Just like I've been telling you. Beginning with that night I was bringing Number Twelve around toward Hungerford and I saw this fella standing there on B-Seventeen.

Mr. Hyde— and Seek

BY

MALCOLM M. FERGUSON



A New England farmhouse, could it shelter a poltergeist?

"FROM the way you describe it, doctor, the Orne Place does indeed sound as if it had a poltergeist bouncing around inside it," Thomas Chadwick reflected, turning the nutmeg grounds about in the tumbler in his gaunt, weatherstained hand. "Which is, of course more readily said than settled. For how does one cope with such a critter? Assuming that Eliza Blaine is host—or hostess, rather—for this manifestation, should she and it be treated according to the concepts which the psychologists use when they so gingerly deal with such a phenomenon, or

Heading by Matt Fox

in terms of the specialists in psychic affairs?"

"For my part, sir, if I were more deeply involved, I'd try neither, but record any phenomena in simple terms and try to settle in my own mind enough of their nature to warrant an attempt to break them up."

"Good. Good. Now can we start from the beginning, with some idea what the term 'poltergeist' means to you?"

"Yes. Sometimes strange supernormal happenings occur in the vicinity of an adolescent which come to be attributed to the operation of an alien power, directing agent, elemental force, or what you will, upon his victim's personality. The picture is that of a hermit crab in the shell of a periwinkle—only here the same skull quarters are shared simultaneously by an alternately dominant and dormant power and victim. The psychologist is on a spot, since this set-up would be duck soup for a Freudian explanation if it weren't for the recorded hell-raisings outside of the subject's accomplishments—such unaccountable but recurrent pranks as a deluge of stones, strange peltings which explain the German name poltergeist—pelting ghost—and a variety of caprices worthy of a Puck or a Kobold."

I refilled Chadwick's glass and my own, taking the hot water with which to dilute the rum from a kettle in a chimney niche built a century back for this purpose.

"But the hell of it is, the symptoms are external to the subject," Chadwick argued. "And the creditability of such evidence must be tested before we can establish a satisfactory attitude regarding the poltergeist."

I was just agreeing with my elderly friend when a car's headlights swept Chadwick's window.

"That's probably Oliver Orne now," I commented, going to the door.

Orne was a strong, wiry man in his late forties. He greeted Chadwick and explained that he had learned of my whereabouts from the switchboard operator, who habitually rerouted the calls of my practice at my request.

"Mr. Chadwick and I were just talking about your ward's case. He has lived and worked in many parts of the world, and exercised common sense on plenty of problems which would stump a young country doctor like myself."

Chadwick cut my eulogy with an ephithet of mock contempt, and turned inquiringly to Orne.

"Well, what I came for is this. Eliza went up to bed about nine, while my wife and I sat in the kitchen listening to the radio. Just after Eliza went upstairs the radio began to static badly, so I turned it off. I went on reading the newspaper, but noticed that everything was real quiet; the sounds Eliza made getting ready for bed sounding miles away. Suddenly she screamed. Then we heard scraping noises ending in a loud crash. I ran upstairs as fast as I could, and found the kid fainted across her bed, with all the furniture drawn in a heap around her—the dresser, chairs, the heavy linen chest. I don't see how it happened."

We sat quietly for a minute or so, then he turned to me.

"Dr. Huntley, I want you to come stay with us until we can find some way to stop these goings-on."

"Why, I'd be glad to, only I don't know about such things. Doctors don't—Perhaps we can find some psychologist——" I stammered.

"No. I don't want an outsider," Orne replied. "Maybe we can cook up some arrangement for you to stay at the house without arousing any suspicion. That would be best."

After some discussion I agreed to this arrangement, with the excuse that repairs to my house made boarding out easier for me. As I could promise no results, I made my fee low, and only chargeable if something favorable were achieved. So that evening I started a case daybook, carefully avoiding technical terms which would influence diagnosis. I give you herewith an abridged version of this case history, day by day:

DISTURBANCE AT THE ORNE PLACE

June 3, 1949—The homestead is a two-and-a-half story frame building, with an

ell—a typical New England farmhouse. Built a century and a half ago, it appears to be in sound condition. The hand-hewn timbers, tenon and mortice and trunnel-fitted, the pine panelling throughout downstairs acknowledge this antiquity, and conceivably help provide whatever susceptibility may be needed for psychic manifestations. It is neither extremely isolated or otherwise, though it would appear so to a city-dweller, for seventy-five yards separate it from the nearest neighbors. The location on the edge of Whittaker Intervale, against the wooded slopes of Dawn Mountain would be agreeable, though lonely in winter when the sun goes down early in the afternoon.

Anne Orne, Oliver's wife, is a small, energetic woman who does a great deal of work, though with all the stir of a wren in a dust-bath. Oliver also is a worker, running his own extensive farm and hiring out with his tractor and other farm and lumbering machinery. Eliza Blaine is an attractive, well-bred girl of fifteen, with large brown eyes and brown hair. Judging by her voice and manners she would appear to be of an even, genial disposition, without perceptible neurotic tendencies surely. She had been adopted the summer before, following the death of her father, a distant relative of Mrs. Orne. Before coming to Whittaker Intervale she had lived in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where her father had given her a number of benefits in education and upbringing.

The first occurrence prior to my arrival at the Orne Place, was in April. Eliza had just bidden her foster parents good night at the door leading from the kitchen which shuts off the back stairs and prevents drafts from dispelling the heat in winter. Oliver saw the door shut, and heard the girl's footsteps ascending the stairs. Then, half a beat behind them another footstep started up. Eliza was nearly at the top of the stairs before Oliver gathered his wits and opened the door. She was alone there, turning to look down at him beneath the bare light bulb. Her face wore a strange, devilish smile, compounded of mockery, yet fearfully, terribly alien.

Oliver stood dumbfounded, turning over in his mind whether Eliza had somehow prankishly skipped upstairs, but was unable to fit this deviltry with her character. So he ended up, staring gape-jawed until she turned, snapping off the light and proceeding in the dark to the next light switch just inside her room. When Oliver turned back into the kitchen, his wife looked up, nonplussed, from her darning. Their discussion made no headway with the matter, partly perhaps since Oliver somehow omitted telling his wife of Eliza's strange expression. They concluded that this might have been a freak of sound involving the wood frame of the old house, and called to mind reports of similar happenings.

IN THE latter part of May on a rainy afternoon, the minister, Mr. Brainerd, came to call. Mrs. Orne was in the kitchen frying doughnuts, while Eliza was washing clothes, using set-tubs and a washing machine in the ell, also connected to the kitchen by a door. Mrs. Orne naturally exclaimed regarding the condition of the house, her hair and dress while Mr. Brainerd climbed from his car. Nevertheless, after shedding these fluttering preliminaries of a parishional call, she had settled Mr. Brainerd, a young, easygoing fellow, over coffee, fresh doughnuts and discreet gossip. He sat facing the open ell door, where Eliza was continuing her work. His coffee cup was halfway to his lips, which were pursed with intent to retract if the liquid proved too hot, when a cake of soap floated through the air coming from the ell and swinging in a near ninety degree arc, to settle in the soap dish by the kitchen sink. That was one cup of coffee Mr. Brainerd did not drink.

Several minutes later, when Mr. Brainerd and Anne Orne looked into the ell they found Eliza caught by nervous laughter, badly convulsed, apparently from the effort of her performance. Indeed the two mystified witnesses had to put her on the front room couch and minister to her with damp cloths, smelling salts, or whatever they thought best. There was no trace of the diabolical about her expression then. On

recovering she claimed she knew nothing of the episode, being quite unable to explain her attack of hysteria.

With this episode the story took form and spread through the community. I was called in, though my examination brought nothing positive to light. For the record, the story that the doughnuts in the bowl on the kitchen table flew onto the coat hangers against the kitchen wall is the invention and whole cloth embroidery of some absent party—a village loafer, probably,—for both Mr. Brainerd and Anne Orne deny any such occurrence.

June 6, 1949—In return for a couple of weeks with a limited practice, I had to put in more time at the hospital. Evenings were more apt to be free, and so far I have managed to be on hand most evenings, though nothing has yet happened during my stay. This evening the four of us were seated at the kitchen table reading—or in Eliza's case, writing a letter to a Portsmouth chum.

A mouse had been scampering in the walls, though I had not been particularly conscious of it until I happened to notice Eliza reflecting a moment over her letter. I could almost see her attention caught by the creature's slight scuttlings and squeakings. Perhaps a sudden muffling of the atmosphere was responsible, as if a focus of attention of some sort were being established. Then all at once Eliza's face changed, taking on the wholly tense preoccupied expression of a cat about to spring. A full, tant minute thus, and then she gave a slight forward thrust, just the shadow of a lunge I would call it. From the wall a shrill, agonized mouse-cry piped. The Ornes looked up in surprise at the blank wall, and its hidden, strangely-racked victim. Neither Eliza nor I turned a heeding head; I of course being concerned with her reaction. While she—well, I think I must yield my medical judgment and say she acted as one possessed, as if the "person within her personality" were supplanted, her mind being temporarily tenanted by a diabolical force. No, this poltergeist is no mere prankster's connivance.

A moment following the mouse's last cry, soon reached in rapid diminuendo, Eliza thrust the very tip of her tongue briefly between her teeth, and in doing so seemed to be released to herself and regain her own personality. Seeing the three of us watching her (rather than the blank wall behind which was a still mouse) she shook her head slightly.

"Gosh, I must have dozed off. I feel awfully tired. I didn't snore, did I?"

I assured her that she hadn't, that we were merely looking up because we thought we had heard a mouse in the wall.

"Yes, I guess I must have heard him scampering around. Funny, you hear a noise like that and hardly realize it."

Shortly after that she retired for the night.

JUNE 7, 1949—I've been thinking a good deal today about the human brain as an organ. Now the heart is fairly plainly a pump—one can comprehend its function upon inspecting it, as in dissection. And so on with all the other organs, their functions can be readily comprehended upon examination. But the mass of gray matter which comprises the brain cannot be thus comprehended as the source of thought process. One cannot see where or how this viscera-like mass permits one to pilot an airplane and carry on a conversation at the same time, or to cope with a novel problem such as the present one of conjecture concerning poltergeists. Since we cannot yet look into the brain and get very far by induction, all we know about it is what we feel and experience ourselves, or what we observe in others. Therefore, I conclude, if phenomenal accomplishments are directed by the brain, of which the brain's possessor is wholly unaware, the fact that these functions were directed by the brain would defy detection.

Thus, for example, the recent experiments at Duke University with cards, regarding "mental telegraphy," or the age-old business of making a divining rod indicate the subterrene presence of water—these in the human brain—or the homing instinct in the pigeon's brain, suggest that certain functions of the brain may exceed anything we have yet ascertained.



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Putting it another way, if we say, "I think, therefore I am," the "I am" cannot directly challenge or enlarge upon the "I think." And if an unaccounted relationship between forces of the mind and external objects, and conjecturably *forces* in the environment exists, there's simply no telling of it.

June 11, 1949—Whatever it is, it's getting stronger, growing like a malignant tumor. Each successful exercise of dominance over Eliza's mind increases the power of the next manifestation, which may be less capricious, and not content with a mouse for a victim. That Eliza is possessed by a malevolent entity or grotesque preternatural schism of split personality—or whatever in hell it can be called, for it is surely spawned of hell,—is apparent to me, whether my terms fit the textbooks or not.

Eliza and I started the evening with a game of checkers. This would prove diverting while keeping me posted on her mental state. She sat in the chair Rev. Brainerd had occupied, facing the ell, the kitchen sink (this is from the chair occupant's left to right) a window into the area of front yard which might be called the ell courtyard. We played across a corner of the full-sized table in order to reach the board readily. Her game was undistinguished, and free from devious tricks or wild gambles. My own is orthodox, too; I'm merely noting the less artful nature of this girl of half my age.

Her chance came in the third game to force me to sacrifice—if she could be reasonably sure of her calculations. As she concentrated on the altemative moves I watched her, though in a moment she screened her brow with her hand, and I could no longer see her face.

Suddenly the air became heavy, a stillness that almost seemed sound ensued, as if silent black wings beat down upon the air. The telephone went "ting"—not ringing, but ticking as these country lines do in a thunderstorm. I looked up at the windows, wondering if a storm were coming, but could see only darkness. Then I saw a face pressed against the ell courtyard win-

dow, a white face, wide-eyed in terror. It was the face of Eliza Blaine! Breaking my gaze from this onlooker's, I turned in amazement to the girl across the checkerboard. Her face was utterly alien, an abominable satyr's mask, looking in cool, sardonic amusement at its counterpart's features pressed so fearfully against the windowpane.

I think that I did the right thing at last. I ran to the outer ell door and threw it open upon the courtyard. Switching on the outdoor light, I saw the courtyard was empty and the impress of no footprints were in the garden plot under the window. I turned back at once to find Oliver Orne just catching the fainting Eliza.

I think I did right, I say, because if I had turned and slapped the face or shaken the shoulders of the creature across the checkerboard from me, there'd be danger of psychic trauma for Eliza, with negative results as far as the poltergeist went.

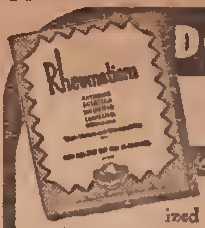
June 12, 1949—This morning I visited Chadwick, telling him what appears here. His advice to me was:

"Your best bet is to find some action which will fit all the various theories about poltergeists, since you are concerned with sure counteraction rather than theorizing. You must apply this action when the poltergeist is dominant, and in such a way that Eliza is done neither bodily nor mental harm. You must surprise the poltergeist, confronting him as strongly as possible at the moment of his greatest aggression. And you must do so with something as opposite in all respects as possible."

I agreed and we concocted, rejected and sorted over a number of possible plans. Finally we hit upon two or three schemes which seem more substantial, if they can be worked out.

I DO not propose to report on them now, as they may never be tested. Since one of them involved the services of a skilled dental technician friend, I spent the rest of the day with him in the hospital laboratory.

June 15, 1949—Fortunately no manifes-



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HOUSE OF STONE

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tations took place while I was completing a variety of preparations, to cover as many contingencies as I could. Today I brought back the acrylic plastic candlestick which my dental technician had produced (using his false teeth manufacture thus divertedly). It was a curious piece, snything bu artistic, with shapeless, topheavy bulges. Remarking upon its amateurish appearance and saying that I could do better with more practice, I put the object on the mantel with my tobacco jar and smoking apparatus. Since it seemed highly improbable that the poltergeist would appear in the presence of any object which it knew to be inimical, I hoped that this candlestick would not appear so.

It had been a hot day, with thundershowers likely to break the oppressively muggy air. Shortly after supper I was standing up, filling my pipe, as is my custom. I was reaching for a wooden match from the wall receptacle and idly looking into the mirror in front of me. My gaze rested on the image of Eliza, or what displaced it. The face was turned as she talked to Mrs. Orne. But the mirror reflected the abhorrent satyr's head, self-confident with the myriad abominations of hell itself.

As I watched, Eliza—or this horror—saw me staring at the mirror, and broke into a Sardonian smile. I turned from the mirror to Eliza. Her features were nearly normal, though the alterations were even now taking place, as if challenging me for my looking-glass view.

I was not idle either, for the time had come. And yet my mind continued turning over the matter of mirrors, the lore of the speculum of Mage Merlin, the Devil's Looking Glass of Dr. Lee, of katoptromancy and vampirism. I had picked up the candlestick and advanced slowly, with a show of irresolution, to the stove. Doctors and acrobats, bull-fighters and actors must have a sense of timing; it is often extremely important. Here the poltergeist must think me uncertain, or bent upon hurting Eliza—at which misdirected aim he could laugh, exult and grow stronger. So I advanced to the stove as the transfor-

mation, unabated, reached its completion.

Mr. and Mrs. Orne sat still, as I lifted the lid of the hot kettle. I had to trust them to heed my injunction not to stir.

Then the lights went out. The electricity in this part of the country sometimes does cut out when there are thunderstorms. But this was too opportune to be chance.

From Eliza's figure sprouted mushroom blobs of static light like St. Elmo's Fires, shining yet not igniting, forming at the hem of her skirt, her waist, the nape of her neck, swamp fire of the fiend's finding. With the room thus weirdly illumined, the poltergeist held both hands aloft with palms taut and fingers radiating, outstretched to the area above my head. Shrilly Eliza's strained vocal cords emitted the fiend's curses and evocations.

All around me stones fell, yet I was unhurt. I drew from the kettle the acrylic plastic figure. The action of the boiling water had fulfilled our aoticipations by invoking the peculiar properties of the candlestick's substances, reshaping it into the form of a crucifix.

As I walked forward with the talisman upraised, the demoniac creature emitted a hell-rending cry as if a bottomless pit gaped beneath him. His hands lowered spasmodically to clutch idiotically about his face. His features withered and writhed, revealed as the electricity came on again when, presumably, the fiend's will power dissolved its damning block. In a moment the struggle was over. Eliza, released, collapsed into her chair, and but for my free hand would have fallen to the floor.

June 15, 1949—Chadwick explains the matter by calling the poltergeist a virulent mass and the crucifix an all-healing antibiotic which is an interesting way of putting it. Since the crucifix was dormant in the plastic (the acrylic being peculiar in that once fixed—in the form of a crucifix—it could be provisionally altered to the rough shape of a candlestick, until its "memory" was stirred by the boiling water, when it reverted to its fixed shape it could form a perfect opposite to the poltergeist.

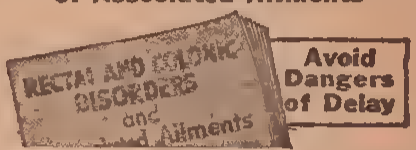
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THE EYRIE

(*Continued from page 4*)

and "Dark Rosaleen" was fair (!); beyond that there wasn't much.

However there were two features which gave me some hope: "The Eyrie" and the Wellman. I've always regretted that you dropped "The Eyrie." Your reasons didn't seem worth much either. January, 1950, gives hopes of a possible return.

W. H. Baxter.

The Editor
WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza
New York 20, N. Y.

Let me tell you frankly—I disagree with you. I've got enough letters published in other magazines so that I don't care too much whether this one is published—partially or wholly—in the "Eyrie," but I do disagree with you in regard to your admitted policy of omitting tabulated story preferences. For if it is the editor whom the author must please, and the readers be hanged; ultimately—it is the readers who the editor must please.

I missed the last WT, it seems, but merely because I have to journey a couple of miles to get it. However, I was surprised at the March WT. Extremely surprised. I enjoyed all of the stories I read, which is all but one. Not one, astonishingly, bored me.

W. Paul Ganley,
North Tonawanda, N. Y.

(Naturally we don't favor hanging our readers; also we keep an eye on circulation figures.—Editor, WEIRD TALES.)

The Editor
WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, N. Y.
U. S. A.

In the latest issue of your excellent magazine (January 1950) to reach me, I was surprised and delighted to notice several letters in the "Eyrie." Does this mean, that you are restoring this excellent feature of your magazine, and will, in future, print readers' letters? I sincerely hope so. I don't think many of your readers would object if you were to publish one short story less each issue, in order to make space for readers' opinion.

I regard WT as the greatest publication of its kind in the world. Since the change of editorship, the greatest story you have published has been Robert Bloch's "The Cheaters" (Nov. 1947). Please keep on giving us plenty of Coye illustrations in WT, also some by Boris Dolgov, and Matt Fox's covers are swell too.

Roger Dard,
232 James Street,
Perth, Western Australia.

(We do *not* hold with omitting a story to make room for a reader's opinion of it. Perhaps this comment will also take care of one reader who hoped for "Irish myth." —Editor, WEIRD TALES.)

The Editor
WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza
New York 20, N. Y.

Thanks for bawling me out about my mathematical non-weird scoreboard. Happy I am to see a revival of "The Eyrie." Especially in the case of your editorial comments and notes from the authors.

Now for the gripe department: Day Keene's story in March was a good story, but a good story that did not belong in WEIRD TALES. Yes, I know—variety's the spice and all that. How about more stories from the old-timers?

W. N. Austin,
Seattle, Washington.

Received for Weird Tales Bookshelf

THE THRONE OF SATURN. S. Fowler Wright, Arkham House, $3.

S. Fowler Wright is widely acknowledged as one of the masters of the modern science-fiction story. This collection of his tales contains "The Rat," "Automata," "Barin" and "Original Sin" as well as other stories which appear as a collection in this country for the first time. His great science fiction novels, such as "Deluge" and "The World Below" are enjoying a new vogue in England, and this new collection from Arkham House ought to appeal to WEIRD TALES readers who always can be counted on to like stories in this genre—the inimitable "The Rat" appeared in our pages in 1929.

PEBBLE IN THE SKY. Isaac Asimov. Doubleday, $2.50.

Here is a full-length science-fiction novel which has not appeared serially before book publication, though Dr. Asimov's name has meant a good deal to magazine readers. The story began when Joseph Schwartz was walking down a street in Chicago, past the Institute for Nuclear Research. Having raised one foot in the 20th century, he lowered it in Galactic Era 827. Any WEIRD TALES readers can take it on from there; it's a good one.

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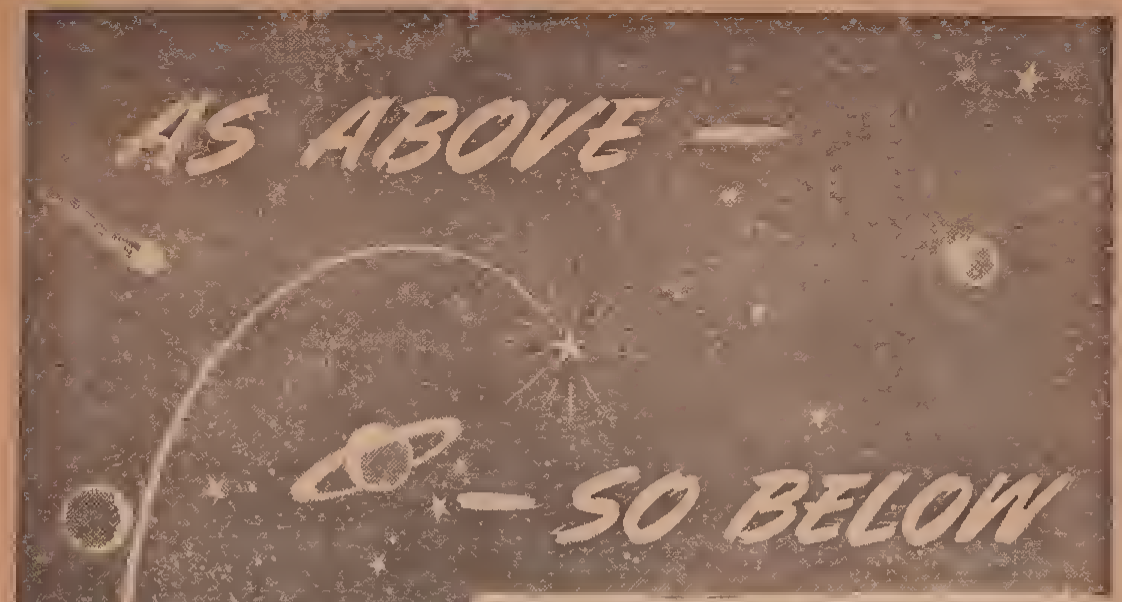
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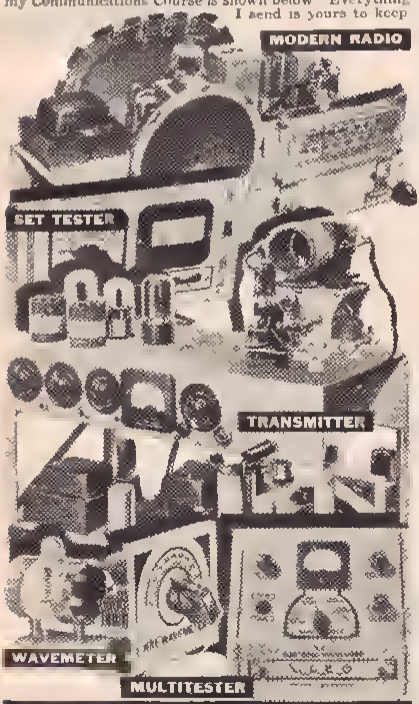
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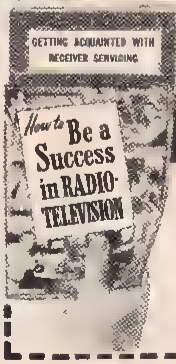
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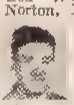
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